This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

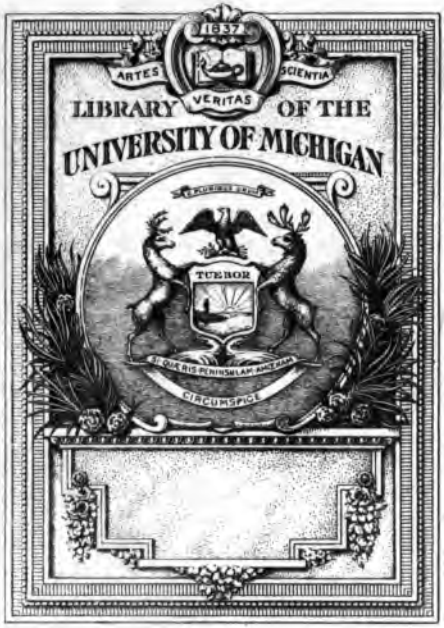
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

A 3 9015 00395 454 5
University of Michigan - BUHR


1837
ARTES
SCIENTIA
VERITAS
LIBRARY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
TUEBOR
CIRCUMSPICE

#193.

Pittsburg Theatre

H. Peters

#193. Pittsburg Theater

H. J. Peters

4/50

0166t

THE TWO VIRTUES

THE PLAYS OF ALFRED SUTRO

The following Plays are published
by SAMUEL FRENCH LIMITED

THE FASCINATING MR. VANDERVELDT
A comedy in Four Acts. 1s 6d

THE BARRIER
A play in Four Acts. Cloth, 2s 6d

THE BUILDER OF BRIDGES
A play in Four Acts. Cloth, 2s 6d

THE FIRESCREEN
A play in Four Acts. Cloth, 2s 6d

JOHN GLAYDE'S HONOUR
A play in Four Acts. 2s 6d

MOLLENTRAVE ON WOMEN
A comedy in Three Acts. 1s 6d

THE PERFECT LOVER
A play in Four Acts. Cloth, 2s 6d; Paper, 1s 6d

THE WALLS OF JERICHO
A play in Four Acts. Cloth, 2s 6d; Paper, 1s 6d

THE PERPLEXED HUSBAND
A comedy in Four Acts. Cloth, 2s 6d

FIVE LITTLE PLAYS (DUCKWORTH)
Paper, 1s 6d net; Cloth, 2s net

All applications for permission to represent Mr. Alfred Sutro's plays must be addressed to the sole agents, Messrs. Samuel French Limited, 26 Southampton Street, Strand London.

THE TWO VIRTUES

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

ALFRED SUTRO

NEW YORK
BRENTANO'S
1915

Hilda
Friedman
6-25-25
12052

Copyright 1914, *by Alfred Sutro*

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN AT
THE BALLANTYNE PRESS
LONDON

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

JEFFERY PANTON
CLAUDE JERVOISE
MRS. GUILDFORD
LADY MILLIGAN
MRS. JERVOISE
ALICE EXERN
BAYLIS
MARY

The scene is laid in London—at Jeffery Panton's house, on Campden Hill, and Mrs. Guildford's, in Chelsea.

ALVIN THEATRE

Under Personal Direction MR. HARRY DAVIS

MR. JOHN P. HARRIS, General Manager

JOHN B. REYNOLDS, Manager — W. B. GARDNER, Treasurer

AUTOMOBILES Cars and other Vehicles may be parked on Duquesne Way, East and West, after 6 P. M.

WEEK COMMENCING

Monday, March 6, 1916

MATINEES

Wednesday and Saturday

MR. E. H.

SOTHERN

WITH

MISS ALEXANDRA CARLISLE

IN

THE TWO VIRTUES

A Comedy in Four Acts

By ALFRED SUTRO

The Persons of the Play

Jeffery Panton.....Mr. Sothern

Caude Jervoise.....Mr. Orlando Daly

Mrs. Guildford.....Miss Alexandra Carlisle

Lady Milligan, sister of Jeffery Panton.....Miss Haidee Wright

Mrs. Jervoise.....Miss Pauline Whitson

Alice Exern, Miss Blanche Yurka

Baylis.....Mr. Arthur W. Ash

Mary...Miss Frances Sommers

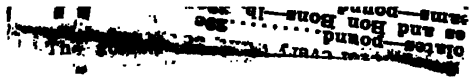
The scenes are laid in London.

Act I—Jeffery Panton's House on Campden Hill.

Act II—Mrs. Guildford's in Chelsea.

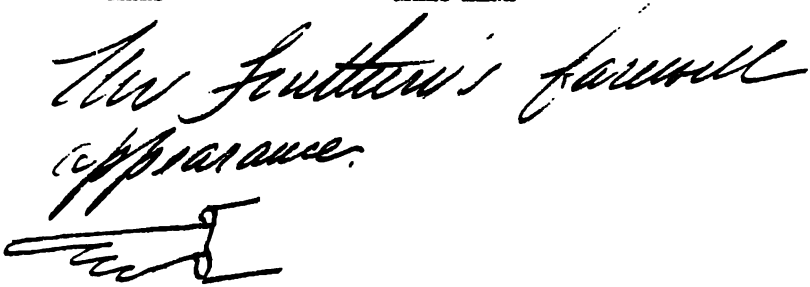
Act III—Jeffery Panton's House on Campden Hill.

Act IV — Mrs. Guildford's in Chelsea.



THIS Play was produced at the St. James's Theatre, on Thursday, March 5, 1914, with the following cast :

JEFFERY PANTON	GEORGE ALEXANDER
CLAUDE JERVOISE	HERBERT WARING
MRS. GUILDFORD	MARTHA HEDMAN
LADY MILLIGAN	HENRIETTA WATSON
MRS. JERVOISE	ATHENE SEYLER
ALICE EXERN	RHODA SYMONS
BAYLIS	GEORGE BISHOP
MARY	MARY LANE



NOTE.—*Throughout, "right" or "left" are the spectator's right or left, not the actor's.*

ACT I

The Library at JEFFERY PANTON'S *house on Campden Hill. It is a large and handsome apartment, on the ground floor, with books everywhere, all of the heavy and historical order. At the corners, to the right and left, are recesses, lined to the top with books. Close to them, on each side, is a tall, narrow window with leaded panes; between these, and below them, row after row of books. On the top of the shelves are figures of early Chinese gods and goddesses, and Ming heroes on horses. The fireplace is in the centre, to the left; the door is on the opposite side. Wherever there is space on the walls, there are shelves, and books. At the back are two large oblong tables, covered with pile upon pile of MS. neatly tied and docketed, and yet in some confusion; on one of these tables is a large stand-up writing-desk. In the angle to the right, well in evidence, is a full-length portrait of a pretty young woman. By its side, on a pedestal, under a glass case, a glove and a withered rose lie on a velvet cushion.*

The room is very heavily carpeted, and has a handsome frieze of old red leather, very rich and

decorative. A small round table, with an armchair on each side of it, is near to the fireplace—and a chair or two are by the tables. Close to the left recess is a sofa, on which JEFFERY PANTON, *a good-looking man of forty-five, is lying, reading. It is evidently an extraordinarily comfortable sofa, most ingeniously fitted with all kinds of contrivances for holding books at different angles. A little heap of books lies on a stool to the left of the sofa.*

When the curtain rises, JEFFERY *is reading, steadily. After a moment* BAYLIS, *the butler, comes in with* LADY MILLIGAN, *a handsome, middle-aged woman, very fashionably dressed.*

BAYLIS. Lady Milligan.

[*He goes.* JEFFERY *gives a start, and his book falls on to the floor. He picks it up, rises, puts the book on the table, and moves genially towards* LADY MILLIGAN.

JEFFERY. My dear Leonora!

[*She offers a cheek, that he touches formally with his lips.*

LEONORA. [*Reproachfully.*] At last we meet, Jeffery!

JEFFERY. Yes, dearest. Won't you——

[*He moves up the armchair to the left.*

LEONORA. [*Sitting.*] It is at least six months since I saw you!

JEFFERY. [*Shaking his head mournfully.*] At least, at least! [*He sits in the other chair.*

LEONORA. And how is Peru?

JEFFERY. Peru? I imagine Peru is doing very nicely. But I so seldom read the papers. And why precisely Peru, dear Leonora?

LEONORA. Because, the last time I called, I was told you had gone there.

JEFFERY. Dear me! How forgetful of me! Of course!

LEONORA. And *did* you go?

JEFFERY. [*With an engaging smile.*] It's odd, Leonora—I can never conceal anything from you——

LEONORA. [*Persistently.*] *Did* you?

JEFFERY. Frankly, I didn't. My memory is shocking—I can't recall the precise reason *why* I didn't. But I haven't been there—no, I certainly haven't.

LEONORA. Your butler—not this man——

JEFFERY. No. This is a new one.

LEONORA. Your butler told me——

JEFFERY. He has left me now—and sings rag-time songs in the music-halls. He always had a voice.

LEONORA. That is very interesting. But he certainly told me——

JEFFERY. He wasn't a very good butler, Leonora—he had shortcomings. And though it's an absolute catastrophe having to change——

LEONORA. [*Firmly.*] Whatever a butler's shortcomings, he doesn't tell his master's sister that his master has gone to Peru—when he hasn't—without some direct instructions to that effect *from* his master.

JEFFERY. How magnificently clearly you put it! I envy you your logical mind, Leonora. And of course you are right. I must have *intended* to go to Peru. I probably took the wrong train, or something. Anyhow, I didn't get further than Paris.

LEONORA. And how long were you there?

JEFFERY. [*Crossing his legs.*] How long? Oh, I really don't know.

LEONORA. When did you get back?

JEFFERY. Quite some time, dear—some weeks—or it may be months.

LEONORA. And you have had no curiosity as to the welfare of myself, my husband, and children?

JEFFERY. Dear, I learn about that in the papers. "Last night Lady Milligan gave a dinner, followed by a small dance. The hostess looked exquisitely handsome in black velvet and pearls."

LEONORA. [*Shortly.*] I don't wear black velvet.

JEFFERY. Of course not, dear—you're much too young—I only used that as an illustration. Only—I mean—when I read the names of your guests—every one with a title, Leonora!—and the description of the flowers, and so forth—I *am* justified in believing that you, your husband, and children are all well?

LEONORA. Jeffery, I have written you twice in the last three weeks.

JEFFERY. Really? The letters will probably be in that basket.

LEONORA. You don't open your letters?

JEFFERY. Not *every* day, Leonora. They're mostly frantic appeals from financial gentlemen to be allowed to lend me money.

LEONORA. You don't open *my* letters?

JEFFERY. Dearest, how can I tell which are yours? If you will, in the future, put an "L" in a circle in the left-hand corner——

LEONORA. You'll open it, and read it?

JEFFERY. Yes—when I have time. You see, I'm frightfully busy.

LEONORA. Still—pottering away—at your history?

JEFFERY. Yes, dear, yes. Oh, it's a very long job!

LEONORA. How far have you got?

JEFFERY. [*Ruefully.*] Not *very* far, I'm afraid. Still at the foundation stage. Look there—all the material! But, you see, when a man is writing a History of Historians——

LEONORA. [*With a shrug.*] Pooh!

JEFFERY. Don't say that, dear Leonora—it hurts me. Sisters should be sympathetic.

LEONORA. For about fifteen years——

JEFFERY. Longer than that, dear—almost since I left Oxford. And I assure you I work very hard. But you see there's such a tremendous amount of preparation stuff. You've no idea how many historians there've been, and how long they lived, and all that. Ranke, for instance—he was still writing at ninety! Well, that takes time. One has to read Ranke—and then one has to read what other people

have written about Ranke—and in order to know what *that's* worth, one is necessarily lead to reading what other people have written about the other people.

LEONORA. Why, there's no end to it! It's absurd!

JEFFERY. It must seem so to you, dear, of course. What do *you* care about Grimm's Law, or Winckelmann crossing the Alps?

LEONORA. Nothing whatever, I assure you.

JEFFERY. You see? But you will, when you've read my History.

LEONORA. [*Shortly.*] I don't believe that History will ever be written—and if it *should* be, I will certainly not read it.

JEFFERY. [*Rising briskly.*] In that case we'd better have tea.

LEONORA. I don't want tea. Jeffery, you are a fool.

JEFFERY. [*Sadly.*] I have always suspected it—and am glad of this confirmation.

LEONORA. I am quite aware that the privilege I enjoy to-day, of meeting you, is due to the indiscretion of your new butler——

JEFFERY. No, no, dear Leonora—I assure you!

LEONORA. So I will make the most of my opportunity. You can at least not go to Peru while *I* am here.

JEFFERY. No—but you *shall* have tea. [*He goes to the side, and rings.*] Whatever my defects, Leonora,

I am a hospitable person. [*He returns to her.*] Would you like me to tell you some amusing little anecdotes about Thucydides?

LEONORA. Why are you not on the telephone, Jeffery?

JEFFERY. My dear, I'd as soon be on the Stock Exchange! To be asked, "Are you there?" by an invisible voice! The mere thought fills me with horror! [BAYLIS *comes in.*

JEFFERY. Tea, please.

BAYLIS. Yes, sir. [*He goes.*

LEONORA. [*With deep earnestness.*] This morning, as I was dressing, I made up my mind that I would come here, force my way in, if necessary, and speak to you as a sister should.

JEFFERY. You needn't reproach yourself, dear, when you get home, with not having done it.

LEONORA. [*Rising dramatically, and pointing to the portrait.*] I want you, I urge you, most emphatically and earnestly—to have that portrait removed from your room!

JEFFERY. The portrait of Isabel!

LEONORA. [*With meaning.*] The portrait of Mrs. Jervoise.

JEFFERY. [*Going to the portrait, and standing before it.*] Leonora, you've said rather unkind things about me and my History, that I've listened to meekly. But I really must ask you to respect—the one great passion of my life.

LEONORA. [*Fretfully.*] Jeffery!

JEFFERY. The one woman I have loved, adored, worshipped—and shall, to the end of my days.

LEONORA. [*Going to him, and laying a hand on his arm.*] My dear brother——

JEFFERY. [*Still gazing entrancedly at the portrait.*] Isabel! Was it some strange—foreboding—that caused me to have her portrait painted—while she still loved me? That is all that is left to me of her.

LEONORA. You have never seen her since she——

[*She pauses.*

JEFFERY. Jilted me? Oh, don't be afraid to say it! [LEONORA *shrugs her shoulders, returns to her chair and sits—he follows her.*] No—I have never seen her. Or heard from her. Except on two occasions in the year—her birthday and Christmas—when I am allowed to send her trifling gifts. I receive, in exchange, a letter of thanks—a simple, kind little letter. Ah, those I *do* open! [*He sits.*] I wait for them, Leonora!

LEONORA. This is outrageous sentimentality—sickly and maudlin—quite unworthy a man of your years!

JEFFERY. [*Mildly.*] Do you really think that, Leonora? But remember that I had never known what love meant till I was forty—and met *her*. She was twenty years younger, but she loved me—she did, oh, she did!—and would have married me but for the accident of her meeting another man, a week before the wedding, and marrying him. I bore it well, didn't I? No moaning, no Timon of Athens

business, no attempt at suicide. Only—don't ask me to remove her portrait from my room—or her—her—image from my soul. Here's tea.

[BAYLIS *has come in with the tea-things on a tray—he places it on the little table between them, and goes.*

LEONORA. [*Impressively, as she bends forward.*] Jeffery, it is the dear wish of my heart that you should marry Anthea Holland.

JEFFERY. [*Pouring out the tea.*]

"Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine."

LEONORA. [*Raising her eyebrows.*] I beg your pardon?

JEFFERY. [*Handing her a cup.*] That was Ben Jonson's Anthea.

LEONORA. [*Taking the cup and putting it down.*] The lady I speak of is the daughter—of the Marquis and Marchioness of Hounslow.

JEFFERY. Of *both* of them! Fancy! The worthy people!

LEONORA. [*With great self-control.*] Anthea is a charming woman, no longer very young. Her mother declares she is twenty-eight, she owns to thirty—I *know* she is thirty-two. A sensible age, Jeffery.

JEFFERY. Most. A muffin?

[*He offers her the plate—she waves it aside.*

LEONORA. She is not a romantic creature—I have spoken to her about you.

JEFFERY. That was tremendously good of you.

LEONORA. And—I can assure you in advance—that the prospect of the—alliance—does not frighten her.

JEFFERY. [*Nibbling at his muffin.*] The brave girl!

LEONORA. She and I are the closest friends. It would make me very happy.

JEFFERY. It is odious of me, I know, to stand in the way of your happiness—but, oddly, it wouldn't make *me* happy at all.

LEONORA. You are our father's only son. You have inherited his name and fortune. Is it fitting that that name should die?

JEFFERY. Dear Leonora, the business has long been turned into a Company—and Panton's Sewing Cotton will endure while there are hoardings on which to advertise it. So you see, for the name to survive calls for no special effort on my part. I shall never marry, Leonora—really, never. Tell that to our heroic Anthea. Say that her fascinating picture, with the age that varies from twenty-eight to thirty-two, can never drive from my heart the rival picture of Isabel!

LEONORA. [*Stamping her foot.*] Jeffery!

JEFFERY. She will think none the worse of me for being told—that I am a man of one love.

LEONORA. Rubbish, Jeffery—rubbish!

JEFFERY. [*Mildly.*] Why, dear Leonora? You don't say that when you read of Dante and his Beatrice,

Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna? I belong to that noble band—I am one of the Faithful.

LEONORA. Jeffery, assuming that you are sincere in all this——

JEFFERY. [*Turning to the portrait.*] Sincere! Oh, my Isabel!

LEONORA. [*Fretfully.*] Your Isabel was a very commonplace little person, not even strictly pretty.

JEFFERY. [*In a rapt murmur.*] "From her eyes darted molten fire, and myrrh and honey flowed from her lips."

LEONORA. She was of bourgeois origin.

JEFFERY. [*Turning to her.*] It is only in China, dear Leonora, that a daughter's exalted rank ennobles her ancestors. You have not forgotten that our grandfather, very soon after his birth, was left at the workhouse by a lady in a hurry.

LEONORA. [*Sternly.*] I *have* forgotten it, and suggest that you should also. *I* only remember that he was a Captain of Industry, and Builder of Empire. But we are discussing Isabel. Whatever doubts there may be as to her appearance, there can be none as to her mind. She is undeniably silly.

JEFFERY. [*With a sigh.*] How often does the world mistake an exquisite, childlike *naïveté* for silliness! I, who was privileged to look into her soul——

LEONORA. A privilege that has now devolved upon her husband—who, I have reason to believe—has more than once regretted——

JEFFERY. *That*—is impossible!

LEONORA. I have met them together—at houses of no importance—and he certainly does not give one the impression of——

JEFFERY. [*Yearningly.*] Does she speak about me, Leonora?

LEONORA. She asks, with a simper, how "my poor brother" is. I could slap her for it!

JEFFERY. I am grateful for her divine sympathy!

LEONORA. You positively make me angry! Isn't it humiliation enough for me that she should brag everywhere of having jilted you? Have you no ambition, no desire to found a family? Mr. and Lady Anthea Panton!

JEFFERY. [*Thoughtfully.*] It would sound splendid in the *Morning Post.* But one only meets *that* at breakfast.

LEONORA. [*Pettishly.*] Jeffery!

JEFFERY. And there's another one the next day.

LEONORA. This trifling is not in the best of taste. It is your duty to get married—your manifest duty. You're a very wealthy man——

JEFFERY. Am I?

LEONORA. Don't you know that you are?

JEFFERY. I never bother about these things.

LEONORA. Who does?

JEFFERY. The Bank.

LEONORA. You mean to tell me you don't invest your own money?

JEFFERY. I shouldn't in the least know how to! Do you?

LEONORA. Suppose your banker robbed you?

JEFFERY. My dear, the manager, who sends for me sometimes, to sign a paper, has mutton-chop whiskers, and wears gold spectacles.

LEONORA. And you sign everything he puts before you?

JEFFERY. With the most simple and childlike faith. He *does* try to explain, and I listen. But I think of something else.

LEONORA. You *are* a fool, Jeffery.

JEFFERY. My friends prefer, in their charity, to say I'm "a bit off it." I suppose it amounts to the same, in the end. Would you mind if I smoked a cigarette?

LEONORA. Not in the least.

JEFFERY. Thank you. [*He takes one out of his case, and lights it.*] Well, dear, to sum up—you've come here asking me to tear from its roots the one passion of my life—Isabel—and plant in her place the sturdy, vigorous, sensible, and unromantic Anthea. You have now recognized, I trust, that that is impossible. So let's talk of something else.

[BAYLIS *comes in with* ISABEL, *and announces* "Mrs. Jervoise."

LEONORA. [*Starting to her feet.*] Oh!

[ISABEL *gives a start at seeing* LEONORA, *and pauses irresolute on the threshold. She is a little lady of twenty-five or so, a trifle extravagantly dressed, with large eyes and a great deal of hair, and a pretty, babyish face.* JEFFERY *carefully extinguishes his*

cigarettes, rises, and goes to her, without the slightest change of manner or voice.

JEFFERY. How do you do, Isabel? [*They shake hands.*] This is frightfully good of you. Oddly enough, your name was just on our lips. Bring another cup, Baylis, some more muffins, and some fresh tea.

BAYLIS. Yes, sir. [*He goes.*

ISABEL. [*Taking a step forward.*] How do you do, Lady Milligan?

LEONORA. [*Recoiling.*] Oh!

JEFFERY. My dear, you said that before. You know Mrs. Jervoise, don't you? Is it the newest thing, in really smart circles, only to say "Oh" when you meet?

ISABEL. [*Whose timidity has become very great, owing to* LADY MILLIGAN'S *reception of her—awkwardly to* JEFFERY.] Your butler didn't tell me——

LEONORA. [*Drily.*] That, at least, is sufficiently obvious. But he is a new butler.

JEFFERY. Sit down, Isabel—won't you? [*He moves up the chair to the right for her.*] And you, Leonora. I imagine that a comfortable chair may enable you, more quickly, to get over your surprise.

LEONORA. *You* are not surprised?

JEFFERY. A man who bothers about nothing but history is never surprised. But you would like to be assured that this is the first time Isabel has called on me?

LEONORA. [*Sitting.*] I should. I have a weakness for fiction.

ISABEL. [*Tearfully as she sits also.*] I give you my word of honour, Lady Milligan——

JEFFERY. And I give you mine. Two such handsome gifts in one day! So do be satisfied, and let's be cosy. [*He pushes up a stool, and sits between the two ladies.*] How's your husband, Isabel?

ISABEL. [*Still very timidly and shyly.*] Thank you. He's very well.

JEFFERY. And the baby?

ISABEL. Yes.

JEFFERY. Your turn now, Leonora. Dear, you are a Society Leader and run a Salon. Can you find nothing to say?

LEONORA. A very great deal. But I prefer not to say it.

ISABEL. [*Eagerly.*] Lady Milligan, I assure you I've never before—never, never! To-day I was passing, and a sudden impulse——

LEONORA. You'd better tell *that*—to the jury!

JEFFERY. Dear Leonora, it was only in Early Victorian days that it was thought incorrect for ladies to call on bachelors. They were also not allowed to ride in hansoms, or dine at restaurants. To-day they drive motor-cars, address public meetings, and explore untrodden continents. So don't you think you might leave off rolling your eyes, as though you were Lady Macbeth in the Sleep-walking scene? Isabel tells us she was passing——

ISABEL. [*Tearful again.*] And wanted your advice Jeffery!

JEFFERY. And wanted my advice. Obviously, a ready means of obtaining it—was to come in and ask for it. Isn't that so?

LEONORA. [*Folding her arms.*] I am not preventing her.

JEFFERY. Of course, there *is* just a possibility that she can only ask it—— [*He pauses.*

LEONORA. When I am gone?

JEFFERY. [*Engagingly.*] It *is* curiously difficult, sometimes, to ask advice of one person before another person. Have you noticed it?

LEONORA. Frequently. But, none the less, I shall not go.

JEFFERY. Dear Leonora, but that is too delightful! I'll have the spare room got ready for you. Is there anything special you'd like for breakfast?

ISABEL. Lady Milligan—truly—I know this proceeding of mine is a trifle irregular—but—I assure you——

[BAYLIS *comes in with the tea-pot and a tray of muffins, which he places on the table.*

JEFFERY. Baylis, the next time there is a lady with me—and another lady calls—I think it would be advisable that No. 2 should be told that No. 1 was there.

BAYLIS. [*Pausing in the act of putting the tea-pot on the tray.*] Very well, sir. In my last place——

JEFFERY. We are really not so much concerned with your last place as with this one, Baylis. That will do, thank you. [BAYLIS *goes.*] Forgive my

correcting Baylis before you—but I am very forgetful. Now, Isabel, I will pour out your tea—as I see you are still emotionally disturbed, and I value this tea-pot. You take, I believe, one lump of sugar and no milk?

ISABEL. [*Faintly.*] Yes.

JEFFERY. [*To* LEONORA, *as he hands the cup to* ISABEL.] I am not sure that Dante would have remembered these little intimate details about Beatrice. It is true that, in those days, there was no tea for Beatrice to take.

LEONORA. [*Pettishly.*] Jeffery, you are a——

JEFFERY. [*Sitting.*] Not before Isabel, dear. There are things that a sister should only say to a brother when they are alone.

LEONORA. I now understand your reluctance to have the portrait removed—though, really, when you have so many opportunities of seeing the original——

JEFFERY. [*Patiently.*] Dear Leonora, if there is any special form of oath you have confidence in, Isabel and I will both take it.

LEONORA. I merely wish to know how long has this *liaison*——

ISABEL. [*Starting indignantly to her feet.*] How dare you!

LEONORA. [*Haughtily.*] Mrs. Jervoise!

ISABEL. I repeat—how dare you! Use such a word in connection with me!

JEFFERY. [*Placidly.*] And French, too—a proof that such things never happen in England.

ISABEL. Jeffery's nearly twice my age. He's old enough to be my father. Why *shouldn't* I come here, if I wanted to? You're silly, really.

JEFFERY. [*In a soft murmur.*] We are forced to admit it.

ISABEL. I haven't seen him for four years—ever since——

JEFFERY. Don't, Isabel! Spare me!

ISABEL. [*Looking at him.*] Forgive me, Jeffery—I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you. But your sister's insinuation—her suspicions——

LEONORA. If any offensive meaning attaches to the word I used, I am willing to withdraw it.

ISABEL. [*Loftily.*] Thank you. [*She sits.*

LEONORA. I am now merely waiting till Mrs. Jervoise has finished her tea. Then we will go away together.

ISABEL. I shall not.

LEONORA. You refuse?

ISABEL. Most certainly I refuse. I have something to say to Jeffery.

LEONORA. That you cannot say before me?

ISABEL. That I cannot say before you.

LEONORA. In that case, Mrs. Jervoise, you cannot blame me if I——

JEFFERY. [*Rising briskly.*] Go without her? No, dearest Leonora, I cannot blame you. I will use my influence with Isabel that *she* shall not blame you. And I hope I shall see you again very soon.

LEONORA. [*Rising angrily.*] Jeffery——

JEFFERY. And you will give my love to your husband and children. Tell Sir Thomas he should most certainly have had my vote at the last General Election—if I hadn't mislaid it.

[*He offers to kiss her—she waves him back.*

LEONORA. You are aware of the construction people will place—on my leaving this young woman with you?

JEFFERY. I rely on you to let it be a *flattering* one, Leonora.

LEONORA. [*Coldly.*] Good-bye, Mrs. Jervoise.

ISABEL. [*Rising.*] Good-bye, Lady Milligan.

JEFFERY. I will see you to the door.

LEONORA. Thank you. That is quite unnecessary.

[*She sails out, with much dignity.* JEFFERY *holds open the door for her, closes it, presses the bell, and then returns to* ISABEL.

JEFFERY. [*With a sigh.*] She is my sister—and therefore I love her. I think, if I had had more than one sister it might have been easier to bear. Sit down, Isabel—forget about Lady Milligan—and tell me what it is.

ISABEL. [*Sitting—then letting her head fall and the tea-cup roll on to the floor.*] Oh, Jeffery, Jeffery!

JEFFERY. [*Rushing to the tea-cup and lifting it very gently.*] Not broken, fortunately.

ISABEL. Oh!

JEFFERY. [*Examining it carefully.*] No, dear—not even cracked.

ISABEL. [*Wide-eyed.*] Can you, at such a moment——

JEFFERY. [*Going to her, taking the saucer, and replacing that, with the tea-cup, on the table.*] I'm fond of these things of mine—and they are with me always. *You* I have not seen for four years.

ISABEL. [*Coyly.*] But you think of me?

JEFFERY. Constantly.

ISABEL. [*Looking round the room.*] I am glad—oh, I am glad—that you have my portrait! [*She rises and goes to the glass case.*] Jeffery, what is——

JEFFERY. [*Going to the case and lifting the cover.*] The glove you left here on the day, the fatal day. . . . By its side, a rose you gave me. [*He replaces the cover.*] In fact, Isabel, as you observe, this place is full of silent memories.

ISABEL. [*Going to the chair to the right of the table, sitting, and drooping.*] Oh, Jeffery, Jeffery!

JEFFERY. [*With a wave of the hand.*] And here I sit, day after day and week after week——

ISABEL. [*Sobbing.*] Jeffery!

JEFFERY. [*Placidly, as he walks to the other chair and sits.*] Month after month, and year after year. Compose yourself, Isabel.

ISABEL. [*Through her tears.*] How can I, when I know I have wrecked your life?

JEFFERY. Fortunately, the History is there.

ISABEL. [*Raising her head.*] You are still working at the History?

JEFFERY. [*Nodding.*] Still.

ISABEL. And there has been no other woman?

JEFFERY. Heavens! No!

ISABEL. You have been—faithful—to the portrait?

JEFFERY. The word "faithful" is too cold. I have been palpitatingly constant.

ISABEL. [*Breaking down again.*] Oh, Jeffery, I wish I had married you!

JEFFERY. [*Staggered.*] What!

ISABEL. I do, I do! You loved me, you knelt before me, you worshipped me. [*She lifts her head.*] Didn't you?

JEFFERY. Yes, yes.

ISABEL. And do?

JEFFERY. [*A little awkwardly.*] Of course. And do.

ISABEL. Then say it.

JEFFERY. [*Hesitatingly.*] Do you think it's—quite? I mean—somewhere in the background—there is a —Mr. Jervoise.

ISABEL. [*Firmly.*] I adore my husband. You I never really loved—never. I didn't know what love *was* till I met him. But it is unspeakably sweet to me, Jeffery, to know that you are still devoted to me and pining for me.

JEFFERY. [*With a sigh of relief, as he leans back in his chair.*] I quite understand—yes. So it is to me. Let there be no doubt as to that, Isabel. I have never ceased—nor *shall* ever cease—to pine.

ISABEL. Oh, thank you, thank you! That helps

me to support my hard lot! For Claude—oh, Jeffery, Claude—I tell myself sometimes a woman has to pay for marrying a really clever man—that I would have been happier—with you!

JEFFERY. That is cruel, Isabel.

ISABEL. [*Tearfully.*] I didn't mean it to be! But you understand—don't you? Of course, Claude is a genius——

JEFFERY. His publishers say so, and publishers are truthful men.

ISABEL. Oh, yes, he's wonderful! His poems are quite sublime. They lift one off one's feet—they certainly do! I admit all that—I'm proud of it. But—this—I cannot endure!

JEFFERY. Remember, dear Isabel, that you have not yet told me what "this" is.

ISABEL. No, I haven't. It's very hard, very difficult, Jeffery, I dare say you've heard—that geniuses need inspiration. Well, when we married, *I* inspired Claude. He said so, everywhere. I figure, under different names, in different lyrics. In the first volume of "Songs of Sorrow," it was I who, as it were, sat for Artemis, and the Venus of the Hills, and the Spanish Cleopatra, and Helen of Troy.

JEFFERY. [*Politely.*] And you are recognizable, under the thin disguise. But what——

ISABEL. Then he fluttered, Jeffery—he began to flutter. My baby was born as he was writing "Medea"—and it seemed I didn't do. But hitherto his friends have been *my* friends—oh, I've watched

over him!—and I've had no cause for the least anxiety. But—the last month—he has conceived an infatuation for—a dreadful woman!

JEFFERY. The deuce!

ISABEL. A Mrs. Guildford—a person not in Society—whom no one knows, whom no one meets anywhere. Oh, Jeffery, one of *them!*

JEFFERY. Them?

ISABEL. The unmentionable ones—who wear no wedding-rings, have no husbands and children—who are harpies, Gorgons, Medusas and Vampires!

JEFFERY. It must be a mixed sort of poem that she's sitting for, musn't it?

ISABEL. Jeffery! Can you jest?

JEFFERY. No, dear, no. But, after all, he may just have met her——

ISABEL. He goes to her every day!

JEFFERY. How do you know?

ISABEL. I've engaged a detective!

JEFFERY. I say though! Isn't that rather——

ISABEL. I have—I'm not ashamed of it! The wife of a genius must take special precautions. I know that he is—enormously impressed.

JEFFERY. But—my dear friend—impressed, after all——

ISABEL. And that *she* is fascinating, in her odious and illegitimate way.

JEFFERY. That's wrong of her, certainly.

ISABEL. And—unless one does something—he's lost to me—and the world!

JEFFERY. Come, come, after all—we must be sensible! This is probably the merest passing——

ISABEL. No! I've taxed him with it!

JEFFERY. You have? And he——

ISABEL. Admitted it! Dared to admit it! And—refused—to give her up!

JEFFERY. Oh!

ISABEL. Their relationship, he declares, is entirely mental—spiritual. So far, I believe it is. So does the detective—a woman of very great experience. But—there is the future!

JEFFERY. Not necessarily, dear. Don't let's exaggerate.

ISABEL. I haven't, Jeffery! I've told you the actual facts. And, oh, I'm dreadfully unhappy! At a loss, at an utter loss, to know what to do!

JEFFERY. [*Kindly.*] Poor little girl!

ISABEL. So—whom could I come to—but you?

JEFFERY. And you've done well. [*He rises and goes to her.*] Look here—I'll speak to Claude.

ISABEL. [*Shaking her head.*] That will be of no use!

JEFFERY. My dear, I'll speak to him very prettily. I can play the heavy father to perfection. And I'll bombard him with historical parallels——

ISABEL. No!

JEFFERY. I assure you—from remotest antiquity—and they shall all end the right way!

ISABEL. [*Slowly, as she raises her head.*] I want you to go to *her*.

JEFFERY. [*Falling back.*] I beg your pardon?

ISABEL. To her—to the Guildford woman.

JEFFERY. My dear child!

ISABEL. If you ever loved me——

JEFFERY. [*Going back to his chair, and sitting.*] I did—and of course I do. That's understood. But you see, I don't know the lady. I can't walk in there as though—as though she were a bun-shop. Come, come—be sensible.

ISABEL. [*Firmly.*] That's the only way.

JEFFERY. My dear, it's no way at all. It's preposterous—out of the question!

ISABEL. No.

JEFFERY. I shouldn't in the least know what to say to her—not in the very least. It's absurd. We must think of something else.

ISABEL. You will tell her that she is wrecking my happiness.

JEFFERY. I can quite conceive that she really wouldn't mind that at all.

ISABEL. That she is taking my husband from me.

JEFFERY. It's just possible, isn't it—that she may have guessed that already!

ISABEL. [*Eagerly.*] Don't you see that if *you* go to her—you whom I—such a proof of your magnificent unselfishness—an unselfishness that is almost sublime—don't you think that will move her, touch her?

JEFFERY. Not a bit—why should it?

ISABEL. It will—I am certain! The detective

thinks so too—I have spoken to her about it. You will play upon her feelings—you will say beautiful things to her! It all rests with you. Jeffery, give me back my Claude! It was you who introduced him to me in the first place—it is you to whom I owe my happiness—let me owe it to you a *second* time!

JEFFERY. My dear Isabel—as you are aware, my love burns for you as brightly as ever—your portrait is still the altar of my daily worship——

ISABEL. [*Happily.*] Ah!

JEFFERY. But I'll be hanged if I call on Mrs. What's-her-name. I'll talk to Claude as much as you like. But I won't do anything else.

ISABEL. [*Rising.*] You refuse?

JEFFERY. [*Rising with her.*] I do. Most firmly.

ISABEL. [*Coldly.*] I am disappointed in you, Jeffery.

JEFFERY. That I shall regret to my dying day.

ISABEL. I know what is passing in your mind.

JEFFERY. Well, isn't it obvious——

ISABEL. You tell yourself that, if Claude's infatuation persists, I may leave him——

JEFFERY. No, no! After all, a genius——

ISABEL. Divorce him, and marry you!

JEFFERY. I assure you, Isabel, that such an idea——

ISABEL. Don't attempt to deny it—and how can I blame you? Still, it is selfish——

JEFFERY. It would be—but—very earnestly——

ISABEL. I threatened him with it, Jeffery! I told

him that he might come home, one day, and find me and the baby gone!

JEFFERY. [*Haggardly.*] The deuce!

ISABEL. That if my love appealed to him no longer —I might take it—to the man who was yearning for it—on both knees!

JEFFERY. But of course he knew—naturally he knew—that that was impossible!

ISABEL. [*Passionately.*] I will *not* be scorned, and trampled underfoot. If my husband leaves me for another——

JEFFERY. [*With sudden determination.*] Look here, Isabel—I'll see the lady.

ISABEL. [*Happily.*] You will?

JEFFERY. I will. Perhaps you're right after all. Perhaps I can say things. Anyway, I'll try.

ISABEL. [*Clasping her hands, as she beams at him.*] Ah! Noble creature!

JEFFERY. I will. I'll see her. Mrs.—Guildford, eh? What's her address?

ISABEL. Jeffery, I've no words in which to tell you——

JEFFERY. That's all right, that's all right. Where does she live?

ISABEL. 37 Ribblesdale Gardens, The Walk, Chelsea.

JEFFERY. [*Writing it down.*] 37 Ribblesdale Gardens, The Walk, Chelsea. Lord, what a business! But I will. I will.

ISABEL. To-morrow?

JEFFERY. To-morrow,

ISABEL. I'll call, the day after.

JEFFERY. I'll—write to you, Isabel.

ISABEL. No—I will call. You shall hear me—thank you.

JEFFERY. [*Meekly.*] Very well, dear Isabel.

ISABEL. And, Jeffery, if you succeed——

JEFFERY. [*Hastily.*] The only reward I seek is to restore your happiness to you.

ISABEL. Oh, how I bless the inspiration that led me here to-day. Have you my photograph, Jeffery?

JEFFERY. Yes. Oh, yes.

ISABEL. Take it with you. Let her see the features of the woman she is trying to wrong. Here [*she dives into her bag*] here is baby's photograph. Let her see that also.

JEFFERY. [*Feebly, as he takes it.*] You haven't got —a picture of—your house in Lennox Square?

ISABEL. [*Thoughtfully.*] I don't think that would help. Our house—though it is our home—looks quite ordinary—from the outside. But let her see me—and my child. And now—oh, my friend!—good-bye!

[*She holds out her hand.*

JEFFERY. [*Taking it.*] Good-bye, Isabel.

ISABEL. I will say nothing to you—of what I think —of your conduct.

JEFFERY. No, no—quite unnecessary.

ISABEL. Till Wednesday. Good-bye. No—stay here! I'd rather you did! You might betray yourself—in your farewell—before the butler. Oh, my friend! Good-bye.

[*He presses the bell, opens the door for her—she goes, kissing her hand to him His eyes follow her—he gives himself a queer little shake—then presses the bell again. He goes to the table, looks at the paper on which he has written the address, and frowns heavily at it.* BAYLIS *comes in.*

BAYLIS. You rang, sir?

JEFFERY. [*Turning.*] Oh, yes. Baylis, I am *never* at home when Lady Milligan calls.

BAYLIS. Very well, sir.

JEFFERY. I am always out of town, Baylis.

BAYLIS. I see, sir.

JEFFERY. I think it might be as well if you said I had left suddenly for Berlin.

BAYLIS. Berlin, sir. Yes, I'll remember.

[*He is going—*JEFFERY *turns to the desk again. As he passes the portrait, he looks at it, and recalls* BAYLIS.

JEFFERY. And—Baylis.

BAYLIS. Sir?

JEFFERY. I am also never at home to Mrs. Jervoise.

BAYLIS. Very well, sir.

JEFFERY. She will call the day after to-morrow. You will say I've been summoned abroad.

BAYLIS. Berlin for her too, sir?

JEFFERY. I think—Australia—for Mrs. Jervoise, Baylis.

BAYLIS. Thank you, sir. That all, sir?

JEFFERY. Yes.

[BAYLIS *goes*. JEFFERY *stands, at the writing-desk, and proceeds to wrestle with the letter to* MRS. JERVOISE.

CURTAIN.

ACT II

MRS. GUILDFORD'S *drawing-room in her house in Chelsea. It is an Adams room, on the ground floor, with tall, narrow windows—and one, at the extreme right, built out, and forming a recess. In front is the road, and the view across the river. The panelling is all of white wood; the furniture is very simple and unobtrusive; on the walls are a few good eighteenth-century engravings, and some bits of old china on the mantelpiece. A piano-spinet fills a corner; on the table are spring flowers in bowls. There is a door to the right, not far from the window; another, up stage, to the left, leading into the hall. Dwarf bookshelves under the windows, and here and there against the walls. The simple Adams fireplace with its overmantel is to the left; close to it a sofa, at the foot of this a small table, on which are a couple of books; by the table an armchair. Further, by the wall, and parallel with it, a long table with books on it—and, by this table, a chair. Everything about the room is modest and unpretentious in the extreme; and the atmosphere is one of complete taste and refinement.*

The place is empty when the curtain rises; the street-door is heard to close; and ALICE EXERN *comes running in excitedly from the left, her hat and cloak on, calling* "Freda, Freda!" *She is a good-looking woman of thirty or thirty-two, her keen face a trifle worn and faded, quick and restless in her speech; she is quietly but pleasantly dressed. She gives a look round, passes through quickly, then knocks at the other door.*

ALICE. Freda!

FREDA. [*Off.*] Yes?

ALICE. Oh, come quickly! I've found out who he is!

FREDA. [*Off.*] Who?

ALICE. Mr. Panton—the Man of Mystery! I know—all!

[FREDA *comes into the room;* ALICE *rushes excitedly to her.* FREDA—MRS. GUILDFORD—*is a woman of thirty-three or thirty-four, tall, with an admirable figure, and a very striking face. In repose, it seems to be hard, and there are lines of suffering; when the slightest animation steals over her, when she smiles and her eyes light up, she reveals herself as a strangely beautiful woman. She is very simply, almost austerely, dressed, wearing no jewels or rings; but the dress she wears becomes her well, and its very simplicity only adds to her charming stateliness. Her*

swift, eager movements are curiously graceful; she has a trick of leaning her head on her hand, and looking hard at the person she is addressing, or listening to.

ALICE. [*Volubly.*] Oh, my dear, my dear! Just fancy! I *told* you the house was being watched! Well, it was!

FREDA. [*Staring at her.*] Impossible!

ALICE. [*Throwing an arm round* FREDA, *and drawing her to the sofa.*] A fact! You've had a detective all to yourself—like a Cabinet Minister!

FREDA. [*Dropping on to the sofa.*] What *do* you mean? How *can* there—how——

ALICE. [*Almost yelling with glee.*] Mrs. Jervoise! Mrs. Jervoise is jealous! And so——

FREDA. [*Amazed begond words.*] Good Heaven!

ALICE. [*Clapping her hands.*] Isn't it *frightfully* funny?

FREDA. It's dreadful—humiliating—monstrous!

ALICE. No, dear—it's funny! Oh, really, it is! And you see, I was sure of it—the figure that always melted away, as one turned the corner—and it got on my nerves—so I started—detecting the detective! [*She claps her hands again.*] And I've just had tea with her!

FREDA. A woman then? And you know her?

ALICE. A fellow-student of mine at the Academy—a thousand years ago! Had our easels side by side! Oh, I tell you, a dramatic moment! Eliza Wilkin, I cried—and she, Alice Exern! There we

were, with our mouths open! Ages since we met! We were going to conquer the world with our Art—and she's a detective, and I'm a companion!

FREDA. You're my friend.

ALICE. Yes, dear—but still a companion, at so much a year—and, I tell you, jolly glad to be it! But let me go on. She had seen me, of course, coming in and out—but thought that she oughtn't to—well I just made her! And we had tea at the Dairy round the corner—and I know all about Mr. Panton and Mrs. Jervoise!

FREDA. What sort of woman can this Mrs. Jervoise be, to do such a scandalous thing?

ALICE. She's a terrible ass, Eliza says—terrible. The pretty ass kind—*you* know.

FREDA. It isn't very nice of your friend—to speak in that way of her employer.

ALICE. Oh, my dear, poor Eliza! She didn't mean to—I got it out of her! Painfully conscientious, poor Eliza—always was—at the Academy she'd put in the model's very last freckle! And she hates herself now for the report she made—about you!

FREDA. [*With a little shiver of disgust.*] A report—about me!

ALICE. Part of her business! She goes to Mrs. Jervoise every day.

FREDA. Well—I can imagine! Mrs. Guildford—Mr. Guildford unknown—that sort of thing?

ALICE. She was staggered—oh, really she was—when I told her—what you *are!*

FREDA. [*With a sad little smile.*] What am I?

ALICE. [*Enthusiastically, as she kisses her.*] The dearest creature on earth! And friend! The best *I've* ever had!

FREDA. [*Patting her hand.*] You haven't said yet who Mr. Panton is.

ALICE. [*Sitting beside her.*] An elderly gentleman who writes books on geography.

FREDA. Geography?

ALICE Yes—it's odd, isn't it? But it seems he was engaged to Mrs. Jervoise—till she met *Mr.* Jervoise—and jilted the geography man!

FREDA. [*A little impatiently.*] But that doesn't explain why he should be coming——

ALICE. [*Gleefully.*] Don't you see? To ask you to *give up* Mr. Jervoise! There! *Isn't* that splendid?

FREDA. [*Staring hard at her, then laughing, in spite of herself.*] Give up Mr. Jervoise! Heaven! But why Mr. Panton? Why he?

ALICE, Oh, my dear, it's quite a romance! Four years ago she jilted him—and ever since then he has lived with her portrait before him—shut himself up and just worshipped her memory!

FREDA. [*Reprovingly.*] There's nothing to laugh at in that, Alice!

ALICE. No, dear—but if you'd heard Eliza's description of the lady! Well—it seems that she went to him yesterday—at Eliza's suggestion—oh, Eliza has worked it all!—and there was such a scene, Eliza says—such a moving, melting scene! The poor man

was so happy to meet her again that he broke down completely, moaned and sobbed, dragged himself round the room on his knees——

FREDA. [*Almost sternly.*] Don't mock a man who's faithful. It's none too common. But I understand now—why he's coming to *me!* To plead for her —evidently!

ALICE. [*Chuckling.*] And to show you her photograph, and that of her baby!

FREDA. [*With a shrug.*] It's quite too amazing! Too inconceivable! Mr. Jervoise seemed to like reading his poetry to me——

ALICE. Eliza declares that it's great—that he's great—wonderful! She adores him—does Eliza—though she has never spoken to him, of course—but she adores him—and it's a mystery to her how you can have resisted——

FREDA. [*Amused.*] Oh—she *does* think I have resisted?

ALICE. She has assured Mrs. Jervoise the relationship is only mental—that was her word.

FREDA. [*Drily.*] That is good of Eliza.

ALICE. Oh, my dear, she told me frankly, *she* couldn't! If he wanted *her*, she said—but there, I mustn't give poor Eliza away! And, you see, they're certain that, in the end, you must succumb before Claude! *Every* woman must, says Eliza!

FREDA. [*Smiling.*] It had really never occurred to me—that Mr. Jervoise was so fascinating!

ALICE. Well, there you have it! Madam, Mr.

Panton will say—as he drops on a gouty knee—Madam, for the sake of the lady I love! And so on, and so forth! And now dear,—may *I* say a word? *Do* give Mr. Jervoise up!

FREDA. [*Staring at her.*] Give him up? With the intensest relief! He bores me dreadfully!

ALICE. [*With a sigh of relief.*] Oh, I'm so glad!

FREDA. [*Frowning.*] Glad! Why, what were you thinking?

ALICE. [*Awkwardly.*] Oh well—he has been coming here every day—and I was afraid——

FREDA. What!

ALICE. [*Turning eagerly to her.*] Oh, forgive me, dear—it was silly, I know. But you see, no one has ever been here before—and I was in terror, lest Mr. Gellibrand——

FREDA. [*Rising and drawing herself up.*] Mr. Gellibrand! You were in terror lest Mr. Gellibrand! You! You too! [*She controls herself, shrugs her shoulders, and walks away.*] You needn't have been afraid—Miss Exern.

[*She sits by the long table, and takes up a book.*

ALICE. [*Jumping up, very distressed, and hastening after her.*] Oh, Freda dear, don't be angry! It was silly of me, I know—oh, I didn't mean to hurt you! Forgive me! Only I *am* such a coward! Such a wreck, Freda!

FREDA. [*Quietly, still turning from her.*] So am I.

ALICE. No—you're clever, and strong. And, you see, my fortunes are bound up with yours—and

I had exactly one and sevenpence left in the world when I answered your advertisement, and had paid for the stamp! Say you forgive me!

[*She hangs over* FREDA—FREDA *puts her book down, turns and pats* ALICE *kindly on the shoulder.*

FREDA. There—there—don't be so upset. It hurt me that *you*—but no matter! We're derelicts, both of us—derelict women—the world is full of them! We'll say no more, Alice. [*She touches her again—then rises, and walks to the sofa.*] But, really, there are times when I feel—that it's almost too much! This Mrs. Jervoise! Her husband comes here, a good deal oftener than I like, and reads his Epic. When he's not reading, he's talking—about himself. About himself always—he never tires. I'm not a woman to him—I'm an ear—a listener. That's the one thing I liked about him—the one thing!

ALICE. [*Nodding.*] I know what you mean.

FREDA. His colossal conceit amused me at first. He told me yesterday he was a Classic. He's quite sure *he* will live, but is doubtful of Swinburne. And his wife is jealous! [*She sits.*] And even you——

ALICE. [*Kneeling by her side.*] I'm a complete and perfect idiot. I grovel before you. You won't give me the sack—will you?

FREDA. You should have a splendid reference!

ALICE. Don't joke about it! The mere thought makes me shiver!

FREDA. [*Patting her head.*] You silly creature! Have I so many friends? You and I will stick together till we see what the next world's like—and I hope it will be more amusing than this one.—Where *is* Mr. Panton? [*She looks at the clock.*] He's late.

ALICE. [*Getting up.*] I think that clock's fast. May I just stop and see him?

FREDA. Of course.

ALICE. I'll go directly after. He wouldn't like to cry before me.

FREDA. It's odd—his letter was, in a way, quite humorous.

ALICE. He may *write* what he likes—but I bet you a hairpin he cries! Oh, there's a taxi stopping! [*She jumps up and runs to the window.*] Yes—it's he! Freda, he's not old at all!

FREDA. [*Indifferently.*] Isn't he?

ALICE. Not a bit—autumnal—but quite *early* Autumn! Well dressed too—his Sunday clothes, I should think. Has his money ready in his hand—and evidently overpaid the cabman. Oh, I say, he *does* look worried, the poor man! [*There is a ring; she comes back into room.*] What a lark! I wish it were me!

FREDA. You'd enjoy it so much?

ALICE. Just love it! Freda, don't give in too quickly, will you? Let it be a bit of a wrench. Have your handkerchief ready. Let——

[*The door opens, and* MARY, *the maid, ushers*

in JEFFERY. *She announces him, and goes. He is looking perturbed and worried.* FREDA *rises.*

JEFFERY. Mrs. Guildford?

FREDA. [*With a step towards him.*] Yes. Won't you sit down? My friend, Miss Exern.

ALICE. [*Acknowledging Jeffery's bow.*] How do you do, Mr. Panton?

JEFFERY. [*Awkwardly.*] How do you do, how do you do. [FREDA *sits to the right of the little table—she motions* JEFFERY *to the sofa—he sits.*] Mrs. Guildford, I must apologize. I'm afraid I'm a trifle late.

FREDA. Only a minute or two. It doesn't matter.

JEFFERY. That's good of you. You see—my watch—a most excellent timekeeper—has lost both its hands.

ALICE. [*Very amused.*] Why not take it to a watchmaker, Mr. Panton—and have the hands put on?

JEFFERY. [*Simply.*] I should have to leave it there, you see—and I do so hate being without a watch.

ALICE. [*Laughing.*] Ah—well, I'm afaid I can't help you any further. Now I must go. You'll excuse me, Mr. Panton.

[*She drops him a low curtsey—he makes an old-fashioned bow—then opens the door for her. She goes—he returns to his seat.*

JEFFERY. [*After a slight pause.*] A nice woman, that.

FREDA. She paints very clever pictures.

JEFFERY. I should like to see them.

FREDA. That is good of you. Very few people care to see poor Alice's pictures.

[*There is a moment's silence;* JEFFERY *is very ill at ease.*

JEFFERY. Mrs. Guildford! What a pretty room!

FREDA. You like it?

JEFFERY. Exceedingly pretty! And the view! A real London view! The best!

FREDA. Yes. The river is beautiful.

[*There is silence again;* JEFFERY *fidgets, and* FREDA *is unable to help him.*

JEFFERY. [*Suddenly.*] I read, the other day, of a fellow who lay snugly in bed, on a cold winter's night—and it got so confoundedly cold that the blankets simply couldn't stand it, and ran down to warm themselves at the kitchen fire.

FREDA. [*Laughing.*] How sensible of them!

JEFFERY. Wasn't it? You know, I wish words would do that sort of thing too—I mean, run off, like the blankets. For I've something so silly to say to you that I'd like the words to say themselves—with me just listening, and wondering how they *can* be so foolish!

FREDA. [*Cheerfully.*] Well, go on, Mr. Panton—and I'll know it's the words, and not you.

JEFFERY. Will you really?

FREDA. I promise.

JEFFERY. I assure you, I've scarcely slept all night. Kept on jumping up, as a fresh idea occurred to me,

and writing it down. Because, you know, I thought I'd read it.

FREDA. It?

JEFFERY. What I have to say. If I read it, it won't be quite as much *me*—will it? Because there are two of us here to-day—there's myself, Panton—and the Victim of Circumstance.

FREDA. [*Nodding.*] I see. Oh, yes. Let us hear the Victim's story, Mr. Panton—and perhaps you'll be good enough to read it for him.

JEFFERY. [*Beaming at her.*] You're tremendously understanding. You know, I'm feeling less frightened!

FREDA. *Were* you frightened?

JEFFERY. Awfully!

FREDA. [*Smiling.*] Fancy! Well—now for the Victim!

JEFFERY. [*Producing a sheet of note-paper, and beginning to read.*] "Madam"—— [*He looks up.*] Of course I hadn't seen you when I wrote that.

FREDA. When *he* wrote that.

JEFFERY. Yes—so we'll let it stand. [*He reads.*] "Madam, four years ago I was engaged to an exquisite girl. She was the most"—there are one, two, three, four, six, eight, eleven lines of what she was the most. We'll skip that, don't you think?

FREDA. We almost might.

JEFFERY. As long as we admit that she was *the* most. That's all right, isn't it?

FREDA. Perfectly.

JEFFREY. Then I'll go on. "A week before the wedding, she threw me over, and married another. My feelings"—oh, a whole page about his feelings! Shall we——

FREDA. I think so.

JEFFERY. Of course, you know the kind of feelings,

FREDA. Absolute, entire devotion.

JEFFERY. Yes.

FREDA. He will have preserved some mementoes of her—such as a portrait.

JEFFERY. A glove she left, and a withered rose.

FREDA. And spent some hours before them every day, in silent contemplation.

JEFFERY. Thank you so much. Oh, hours. Well —now comes the surprise—the dramatic moment. Who do you think the hated rival was?

FREDA. [*Placidly.*] Mr. Claude Jervoise.

JEFFERY. [*With a jump.*] You know?

FREDA. Why else would you be here—I mean, the Victim?

JEFFERY. [*Nodding.*] Of course. But you *are* quick. Yes, Mr. Jervoise. She married Mr. Jervoise. I've not seen her since—till yesterday. Then she came and told me——

[*He pauses.*

FREDA. What?

JEFFERY. [*Suddenly turning to his paper again.*] Ah—let's see.

FREDA. No. Tell me yourself. We've done with the Victim now—he has gone to warm himself at the

kitchen fire.—Mr. Panton, I think it's fine of you to have come here to-day.

JEFFERY. I'm beginning to think that myself.

FREDA. Mrs. Jervoise needn't really have worried about her husband's visits to me.

JEFFERY. I know that, of course. But she——

FREDA. In any event, she need have no cause for worry in the future. Those visits—shall cease.

JEFFERY. [*Eagerly.*] They shall?

FREDA. I give you my word.

JEFFERY. Oh, that's quite too splendid of you!

FREDA. Did you think I'd refuse?

JEFFERY. I didn't think at all—I was simply knocked all of a heap!

FREDA. What did Mrs. Jervoise tell you about me?

JEFFERY. [*Laughing.*] Well—it goes on getting madder and madder—she employed a detective!

FREDA. I know.

JEFFERY. You do?

FREDA. Yes. She turns out to be an old friend of Miss Exern's. They had tea together this afternoon. That's how I know about *you*. The devotion—and so on. I liked it. But, without that, I'd have consented. From the moment I knew it hurt Mrs. Jervoise. I hate giving pain. Though, really, her husband only read his poetry to me.

JEFFERY Mawkish stuff, isn't it?

FREDA. *I* think so. But you haven't told me yet what Mrs. Jervoise said about *me*.

JEFFERY. No. And of course I don't mean to.

FREDA. Why?

JEFFERY. Because it was silly.

FREDA. Perhaps it was true. D'you know, Mr. Panton—I don't suppose we shall ever meet again—but I'd like you to think well of me.

JEFFERY. I do.

FREDA. Mr. Panton, I'm one of those women who're —outside the pale.

JEFFERY. [*Nursing his leg.*] How jolly.

FREDA. [*Frowning.*] I beg your pardon?

JEFFERY. Oh, of course that sounds foolish. I didn't mean it that way. Only all the women I meet are *inside*. And they're tiresome.

FREDA. [*With a smile.*] You forget Mrs. Jervoise.

JEFFERY. Yes, yes. Just for the moment. But this is a holiday.

FREDA. She, of course, thinks I'm a kind of—Dame aux Camélias.

JEFFERY. I skipped the eleven lines of description of Mrs. Jervoise. But, among her other gifts, I did not include—penetration.

FREDA. Mr. Panton, there *is* no Mr. Guildford. There never was.

JEFFERY. Poor chap. How very hard on him.

FREDA. Do you ever go to the sea-side?

JEFFERY. Not since I was a boy. But I'm always intending to. I'm so fond of shrimps.

FREDA. You may remember having seen—a bit of seaweed—thrown up on the beach?

JEFFERY. Oh, yes. Often.

FREDA. Well, that's me. Or I. Would you rather I said I?

JEFFERY. I'd have said "me" myself. But my grammar's in shirt-sleeves.

FREDA. Just a bit of—stranded—seaweed. But—though it's far away from the sea—and will never get back there—the sea standing for Society, and the properly hall-marked women——

JEFFERY. [*Looking curiously at the books on the table beside him.*] Like my sister. But I beg your pardon—you don't know my sister. And you're lucky.

FREDA. [*Laughing.*] How *can* one keep up a rather nice strain of imagery if you drag in a perfectly irrelevant sister?

JEFFERY. You wouldn't call her irrelevant if you met her. You wouldn't *dare* to. But I'm sorry I interrupted. Please go on. It's most frightfully interesting.

[*He tries to get at the title of the book that lies nearest to him.*

FREDA. You are *not* interested?

JEFFERY. [*Guiltily, taking his hands off the table.*] But I *am*. I am, really. Please!

FREDA. Mr. Panton, the rent of this house, its upkeep, the salary of my companion, our living expenses, are paid by a Mr. Gellibrand, an elderly American gentleman—who befriended me when I needed a friend very badly.

JEFFERY. Really!

[*He starts again surreptitiously working the book round to him.*

FREDA. He comes to London very rarely—but when he does he insists on staying here, as he pays for the house——

JEFFERY. [*Getting the book nearer and nearer.*] It's a very nice one.

FREDA. The few things in it are mine—but he pays for everything. And so——

JEFFERY. [*Who has at last succeeded in reading the title of the book—springing up excitedly.*] I say! Ottfried Mueller's Treatise on Aegina! *You* reading that!

FREDA. [*Staring at him.*] Yes.

JEFFERY. You read German! History!

FREDA. I do. But what——

JEFFERY. [*Feverishly turning over the pages.*] And, by Jove, notes in it! Heaps of 'em! Yours?

FREDA. [*A little fretfully.*] Of course they're mine. Mr. Panton——

JEFFERY. [*Hastening to the table at the back, turning over the books there, then going to the shelves.*] Ottfried Mueller! You reading Ottfried Mueller! And here are his Dorians! And, by Jove, Gervinus! Jacob Grimm! Boeck! Tocqueville—Eichholtz, Mommsen, Taine! [*He turns eagerly to her.*] Mrs. Guildford—you're keen on history?

FREDA. Yes. Are you?

JEFFERY. The passion of my life!

FREDA. You wrote books on geography, the detective said.

JEFFERY. She got that from Isabel—and history and geography mean much the same to her, poor dear! [*He's at the shelves again, fingering book after book.*] Grote, Seeley, Acton, Froude. Now isn't that extraordinary!

FREDA. [*Rising.*] I suppose it is, in a way. I suppose it's strange, in a woman. But I read every day, in the London Library. It was there I met Mr. Jervoise. I do nothing but read. That's my life.

JEFFERY. [*Still at the shelves.*] And here, all these fellows! Isn't it great, that stuff of Niebuhr's! What a man, Niebuhr! And you've the Codex. You've volumes of the Codex!

FREDA. [*Going to him.*] I picked them up—fancy—in a twopenny box in the Charing Cross Road!

JEFFERY. [*With ever-growing excitement, as he turns over the leaves of the book.*] And read them! You've read them! Notes in the margin! References! By Jove! [*He drops into the chair by the long table, still clutching the book, bends forward, and says, very solemnly.*] Mrs. Guildford, I'd like to buy all this, please—the notes, and the knowledge, and you!

FREDA. [*Struggling between amusement and anger.*] Mr. Panton!

JEFFERY. I would. I'm awfully rich. You said something before about a Mr.—I didn't quite catch his name—you see, I was looking at the book——

FREDA. I told you that Mr. Gellibrand paid for——

JEFFERY. Yes, yes, that was it. Well—does *he* care about history—or Hecuba for him? Of course not. So it's stupid, isn't it? Give Mr.—whatever his name is—a month's notice—or, what's better still, pay him his month—and I'll take over everything—including Miss Exern—and the view!

FREDA. [*Frowning.*] Mr. Panton—do you precisely understand——

JEFFERY. [*Rising and going to her.*] Mrs. Guildford—of course I'm eccentric—and like people to think I'm a fool. I assure you it saves no end of trouble. But I thoroughly and perfectly understand. I understood what you meant about the seaweed—and though I wouldn't let you finish your little story, I finished it my own way.

FREDA. Which was?

JEFFERY. That the seeweed that had been washed up on the beach—and was sniffed at by all the elderly weeds that remained in the grubby old sea—was still the best kind of seaweed—alive, and sincere, and real—though only Father Neptune knew it!

FREDA. [*Moved.*] It's nice of you to say that.

[*She sits on the sofa.*

JEFFERY. And *I* know it too.

FREDA. *How* do you know?

JEFFERY. Shall I say because I'm a bit of a fool, and don't bring home my opinions in the same bag as my groceries? That's enough about *that*. Mrs.

Guildford, history is a passion with me. I've worked for twenty years at a History of Historians—you know, a comparison of their methods, their point of view, their prejudices, their achievements. It's fascinating beyond words. But I'm swamped with material—I'm stuck in the mud. You'll come and help me!

FREDA. [*Smiling at his vehemence.*] My dear Mr. Panton——

JEFFERY. My banker will arrange everything.

FREDA. Has it occurred to you—that you know nothing about me?

JEFFERY. You know nothing about my banker. [*He plumps himself into a chair.*] But you'll like him. He has three sheepdogs.

FREDA. [*Laughing.*] Don't you see how absurd this is?

JEFFERY. Of course it's absurd—it's splendidly absurd—all the best things in life *are* absurd. So that's settled—isn't it?

FREDA. [*Indulgently.*] Come, come—let's be serious!

JEFFERY. Good Heaven, don't you think I am?

FREDA. You've seen me for ten minutes——

JEFFERY. You *are* odd.

FREDA. I?

JEFFERY. Of course you. Here I've found what I've been looking for all my life—a person to whom history means what it means to me. A woman who can help me to get out my book! I've had secretaries—young men from Oxford—they're too clever—and

the old ones are too old. You'll come every afternoon, and we'll work. And exit what's-his-name!

FREDA. You ask no questions about him?

JEFFERY. Now what question on earth *should* I ask except the quickest way to get rid of him?

FREDA. And you think I can possibly——

JEFFERY. [*Fretfully.*] *Of course* you can possibly! Don't be silly! Haven't I told you I'm frightfully rich? I don't spend a quarter of my income—and more money keeps on coming in—and I'm always being bothered to invest it! Don't you *want* to get away from Mr. Thingummy!

FREDA. He has been very good to me.

JEFFERY. Well, we'll write him a charming letter.

FREDA. Of course he *is* dictatorial—perhaps because he's so old—and inclined to be—inconsiderate . . .

JEFFERY. I knew he was—sure of it! Well, out he goes! Look here, it was stupid of me to say I wanted to buy you—that was only what I meant to—I mean, I couldn't just find the word. I engage you for 999 years as my collaborator in the History. I dare say you've done some writing yourself?

FREDA. [*Diffidently.*] Oh—just a little—just——

JEFFERY. [*Springing up again.*] Colossal—gorgeous—immense! I engage you for 999 years—or longer if you like. And we start to-morrow. And when I leave here I go to the bank, and give instructions to *my* old gentleman.

FREDA. [*Smiling.*] And what will *he* say, do you think?

JEFFERY. My dear friend, he has given up *saying* things—he merely gasps! He'll come here to-morrow—and arrange things with Miss Exern. And they can gasp together!

FREDA. You wonderful person! You don't even want to know——

JEFFERY. All I want to know is that you'll come to-morrow. I've all the material there, you see—we can work better.

FREDA. At any rate let me first—I mean—you must——

JEFFERY. [*With a step towards her.*] Look here, Mrs. Guildford—we who know history know that men haven't always behaved very well to women. Most men are fools, and don't know. Well, I *do* know. In an odd sort of way I know *you*—oh, I do—don't you worry! And we're just fellow workers, who've got to bring out this book, and intend to. Not another word, please! If you raise a single objection, I declare I shall be disappointed in you. No—don't say anything—just nod your head—twice. [FREDA *does so, half laughing, half crying.*] That's right—fine! Now let's stagger Miss Exern!

[*He is going to the door to the left—she rises, and stops him.*

FREDA. No—don't stagger her yet—let's wait—wait a week! In the meanwhile, I'll come every day!

JEFFERY. You will?

FREDA. I will—I promise!

[*The door to the left suddenly opens, and*

MARY *ushers in* CLAUDE JERVOISE—*a good-looking, strenuous man of thirty, very carefully dressed, somewhat pallid and weary, with a keen eye and a poet's smile. He starts at seeing* JEFFERY, *and ejaculates* "Panton!" *goes to* FREDA, *and bends low over her hand.* JEFFERY *and* FREDA *had forgotten all about* CLAUDE, *and are very embarrassed.*

CLAUDE. [*Turning to* JEFFERY, *standing between him and* FREDA.] How are you, Panton? [*They shake hands.*] I wasn't aware that you had the privilege of——

JEFFERY. [*Awkwardly.*] I didn't. This is the—first time——

CLAUDE. Ah. Then I congratulate you—on your good fortune.

JEFFERY. Thanks. Thanks very much.

[*There is a moment's silence.*

FREDA. [*Nervously.*] Let us sit down.

JEFFERY. That's a splendid idea. Let's.

[*He sits at the large table, by the wall, and drums his fingers on it.* FREDA *sits on the sofa, and motions* CLAUDE *to the armchair.*

CLAUDE. [*With heavy humour, as he looks from one to the other, before he sits.*] You're very solemn, both of you? I trust I'm not—intruding?

FREDA. [*Hurriedly.*] Oh, not in the least.

JEFFERY. [*Drumming hard on the table.*] Dear me, not at all.

[CLAUDE *looks puzzled; he sits; there is again a moment's awkward silence.*

CLAUDE. [*To* JEFFERY.] Quite a long time since we——

JEFFERY. Yes. Mrs. Guildford knows.

CLAUDE. I beg your pardon?

JEFFERY. I mean—the circumstances under which—I have told her.

CLAUDE. [*With a slight frown.*] You have? [*He turns to* FREDA.] Nothing, I hope, to my discredit?

FREDA. By no means. No.

CLAUDE. It was one of those—happenings——

JEFFERY. Nothing more. Fate. I conveyed that.

CLAUDE. Forgive me—but I can't help wondering—*why* you told Mrs. Guildford?

JEFFERY. Why?

CLAUDE. Yes.

JEFFERY. [*Shifting in his chair.*] Oh—well—I had come to ask something——

FREDA. [*Impulsively, as she bends forward.*] Oh, Mr. Jervoise—it had never occurred to me—though it should have—that your wife disapproved of your visits!

CLAUDE. [*With a violent start.*] My wife!

FREDA. Yes.

CLAUDE. [*Amazed—after a fierce look at* JEFFERY, *who has his eyes fixed on the wall-paper, and is humming a tune.*] But how—who——

FREDA. *Does* she?

CLAUDE. [*Gnawing his lip.*] Dear lady——

FREDA. *Does* Mrs. Jervoise disapprove?

CLAUDE. [*Clearing his throat.*] Mrs. Guildford—my wife is a most admirable woman—and Heaven forbid that I should say one word against her.

JEFFERY. [*In a confidential murmur to the wall.*] Mrs. Guildford and I would join with Heaven in forbidding it.

CLAUDE. [*Turning fiercely on him.*] Panton—it seems absurd and impossible—but I cannot help connecting *you* with this.

JEFFERY. [*Who has now completely recovered his aplomb.*] Isabel came to me yesterday—and confessed that she was unhappy.

CLAUDE. She went to *you!*

JEFFERY. [*Lightly.*] As to a father. I suppose I'm old enough to be her father. How old *is* Isabel now?

CLAUDE. [*Leaning forward.*] Mr. Panton, permit me to say that this action of yours is the most——

FREDA. [*Breaking in quickly.*] No, no. It was *fine* of Mr. Panton. And I am grateful to him.

CLAUDE. [*Turning to her.*] Don't say that, I beg of you. He had not the least right. It was ungenerous —to a degree.

JEFFERY. You see, Isabel is unhappy.

CLAUDE. [*Energetically.*] Without the least cause—the very least cause! Mrs. Guildford has the exquisite kindness—to allow me to read to her——

FREDA. [*Rising.*] A privilege that I have valued, Mr. Jervoise—but must deny myself in future.

CLAUDE. [*Starting to his feet.*] What!!!

FREDA. [*A little distressed, in spite of herself.*] I must—oh, I must! From the moment that your wife —disapproves——

CLAUDE. [*Furiously.*] Mr. Panton's motive is obvious. He sought to be revenged. He has exaggerated—distorted——

FREDA. Dear Mr. Jervoise, you have admitted it yourself. What else can we do?

CLAUDE. Anything but that. That is impossible. I appeal to your—nobler self. You are not a woman like other women. You are above jealousy—jealousy cannot touch you. My wife will very soon realize——

FREDA. [*Firmly.*] Mr. Jervoise, this must be the last time.

CLAUDE. [*With deep emotion.*] Think what you are saying. Those are very dreadful words. And you cannot mean them.

FREDA. I do, Mr. Jervoise. I must. It is very painful to me—but I must. Do not make it more painful. Good-bye!

[*She goes through the door to the right.* CLAUDE *makes a swift movement to detain her—* JEFFERY *jumps up and intercepts him.*

JEFFERY. Don't, my dear fellow—don't. She can't help herself—you must see that. It's the only thing to do.

CLAUDE. [*Turning fiercely on him.*] Panton, you will let me tell you that your behaviour in this matter has been scandalous and outrageous. If my wife went to you, it was a private visit, and a private

matter—and *I* was the person for you to have gone to, and not Mrs. Guildford. It was unpardonable, sir, and you have acted like a greengrocer. I have used the word, sir, and I will not withdraw it.

JEFFERY. [*Placidly, as he sits on the table.*] I don't resent it, Jervoise—I have a weakness for greengrocers. I knew one who——

CLAUDE. I beg that you will spare me your flippancy, sir—this is not the moment—by Heaven, it is not! To me it is of the deepest seriousness—it is vital! Panton, I *need* Mrs. Guildford!

JEFFERY. [*Pleasantly.*] You who have Isabel!

CLAUDE. Mrs. Guildford chances to be possessed of a sympathy—that is of the rarest and most precious——

JEFFERY. Looking younger than ever, Isabel, I thought. Dazzled I was—dazzled!

[CLAUDE *breaks away from him with a fierce exclamation—takes a turn up the room, and passes his hand feverishly through his hair—then comes back to* JEFFERY, *draws a chair close to him, and sits.*

CLAUDE. [*With proud humility.*] Panton—I permitted myself an expression just now—that I regret, and withdraw.

JEFFERY Really you needn't. I wish you'd let me tell you about that greengrocer fellow——

CLAUDE. [*With a wave of the hand.*] I withdraw—and apologize. I recognize the—circumstances—and that you, mistakenly, thought it your duty. I acquit

you of any—intentional . . . I say I acquit you. I trust I have made amends?

JEFFERY. Oh, most handsomely!

CLAUDE. Very well then—hear me. Panton, I am a good husband—devoted, patient—I am all that a husband should be. But I am not only a husband, Panton—I am a poet.

JEFFERY. [*Politely.*] And one of our greatest.

CLAUDE. It is good of you to say so. But so far I have not—I have not yet. No—not yet. The press, the public, are kind to me. The critics are generous—perhaps unduly so. It is not for me to quarrel with my judges. But, Panton, I have not yet.

[*He pauses impressively and shakes his head.*

JEFFERY. What haven't you yet, my dear fellow? I'm dying to know.

CLAUDE. I have not yet produced the work that is *really* I—for which—oh, I say it in all modesty!—people are waiting. That is to come—it is here. [*He taps his brow.*] And Mrs. Guildford is helping me to it.

JEFFERY. Such a misfortune that Isabel——

CLAUDE. [*Passionately.*] I swear to you, on the head of our child! Mrs. Guildford, to me, is merely an Intellect. A Mind. An Inspiration. And I conjure you, if you in the slightest degree value Literature——

JEFFERY. I do. Oh, I do.

CLAUDE. Then hasten to Isabel—now that you are acquainted with the facts—tell her that you have

seen Mrs. Guildford—and me—and that you are satisfied of the holiness of our alliance.

JEFFERY. I am. Oh, I am! But then so is Isabel. And still she is unhappy. And anyhow—it wouldn't be any good—my shuttlecocking myself to and fro—because Mrs. Guildford has quite made up her mind——

CLAUDE. You will go to her first—and unsáy what you have said.

JEFFERY. One can't really, you know—can one? Because, after all, what I said was true.

CLAUDE. [*With a great effort at self-control.*] You don't quite understand—that is *my* fault, of course. But listen. I am writing an Epic on Boadicea. It is—it will be—Panton, I don't overrate my modest efforts—I am not a conceited man—no one can call me that. But—well, I lay bare my heart to you—I speak to you as a brother—this Epic of mine—I think I may say—truly, I may——

JEFFERY. I'm sure that you may—I'm quite sure. It's going to be sublime, I know—quite wonderful. But that can't make any difference—I mean, as far as Mrs. Guildford and I are concerned. Can it?

CLAUDE. [*Coldly as he rises.*] You will not help me?

JEFFERY. Unfortunately, I can't.

CLAUDE. Have I made it clear to you—do you understand—that if, owing to you—my visits to this house cease—I shall be unable—you hear that, unable—to add another line to my Boadicea?

JEFFERY. [*Piously.*] Now Heaven forbid! But how can I help it?

CLAUDE. I have told you. Do you refuse!

JEFFERY. I must.

CLAUDE. [*With sudden, violent passion.*] Then I swear to you that on the unfinished manuscript, there shall be a plain statement of the reason *why* it was unfinished—and the name of Jeffery Panton shall be infamous to all posterity! Not another word, sir! I have done with you!

[*He stalks to the side and rings.*

JEFFERY. [*Humbly, as he rises, and takes a step towards him.*] At least, in justice to me—let *all* the facts be known!

[CLAUDE *shrugs his shoulders disdainfully, as he stands with folded arms on the hearth-rug.*

JEFFERY. I'm entitled to that, Jervoise—I really am!

CLAUDE. [*Suddenly taking a violent step towards* JEFFERY, *and standing almost face to face.*] Jeffery Panton, it was *you* who introduced her to me!

JEFFERY. [*With a deep sigh.*] Yes. It was I.

CLAUDE. [*Almost swaying in his emotion.*] It was *you* who introduced her!

[MARY *comes in;* CLAUDE *breaks away.*

CLAUDE. Tell Mrs. Guildford that I crave one word with her before I go. She is in there.

[*He nods towards the inner room;* MARY *goes; there is silence till* FREDA *comes out.*

CLAUDE. Madam, I came to-day to read to you what yesterday you had inspired me to write. [*He produces a slender roll of manuscript from his pocket, tears it in two, and throws the pieces on the floor.*] There it lies, Madam—before the feet that have spurned me. Farewell!

FREDA. [*Gently.*] Good-bye, Mr. Jervoise.

CLAUDE. Farewell! As for you, Panton——

[*He glares fiercely at* JEFFERY—*then stalks out of the room.* FREDA *and* JEFFERY *look at each other, and exchange a silent smile.*

JEFFERY. Well, it really passed off very pleasantly. What a mess he has made! [*He starts picking up the pieces.*] Poor Boadicea! [*The front door slams violently.*] I say, how he slammed the door! [*He goes to the window.*] I *must* see him go down the street! Who's the woman opposite, watching? Oh, of course—the detective!

FREDA. [*Tripping to the window.*] Let me see. Yes. She's rather nice looking.

JEFFERY. Quite.

FREDA. You know, she adores him.

JEFFERY. Fancy! Oh, look! His hat has blown off—she rushes, and picks it up!

FREDA. What a joy that must be to her. The first time they've met! They're talking.

JEFFERY. Yes. What's he doing? Oh, I see—it's raining.

FREDA. And he's offering her his umbrella!

JEFFERY. Jupiter! Think of it! Yes—he is!

FREDA. Won't Eliza be happy! That's her name—Eliza. Look at her, trotting beside him!

JEFFERY. [*Turning from the window.*] Mrs. Guildford, posterity isn't in luck! They'll have that Epic after all!

CURTAIN

ACT III

JEFFERY PANTON'S *Library, as in Act I. The portrait has been removed, also the trophy with the glove and the rose—and another table has been placed close to* JEFFERY'S. *He is standing at his desk, facing the windows; she is seated, with her back to them. They are both busily working.* FREDA'S *hat and cloak are on a chair by the wall.*

The room has a much tidier appearance than before; the piles of manuscript have been docketed and labelled; books are no longer strewn all over the place. On FREDA'S *table are a few piles of manuscript—and she is going through one of them, with a pencil in her hand. There is a moment's silence after the rise of the curtain, each going on with his work.* FREDA *suddenly speaks, as she shakes her head.*

FREDA. No.

JEFFERY. [*Turning.*] I beg your pardon?

FREDA. [*Looking up.*] Oh—I didn't mean to say anything! But you *are* severe on poor Lamartine!

JEFFERY. Not more than he deserved, Freda.

FREDA. You say "There was never a mind that had a more complete contempt for the truth."

JEFFERY. Tocqueville said that, Freda—Tocqueville—and he was right.

FREDA. [*Thoughtfully.*] I don't know. That magnificent study of Charlotte Corday——

JEFFERY. All woven out of his head. We know very little about her—Lamartine knew less. But that didn't matter to him. He just let himself go.

FREDA. He made her live.

JEFFERY. [*Going to her.*] As a heroine of fiction! We just know two or three events in her life.

FREDA. He threw bridges across them—he admired her so immensely! Perhaps she wasn't exactly as he painted her—but she *may* have been. And he makes us feel that she *must* have been.

JEFFERY. Of course, to me, history is a rigid search after truth.

FREDA. Yes—but it's more than that. It's making the people of to-day understand how the other people lived and died—and *why* they did it. But I'm sorry I interrupted.

JEFFERY. Not a bit. I must think over what you say. One gets too hidebound, perhaps. Mark that passage. I'll tone it down.

FREDA. Will you? I'm glad.

[*She takes her pencil, and marks the passage.*
JEFFERY *remains standing beside her.*

JEFFERY. I say—what made *you* take to history?

FREDA. Oh, the oddest thing. A lame old cobbler!

JEFFERY. A cobbler?

FREDA. Yes. He was a great friend of mine. I was brought up in the country, with a nurse—I was an only child—and no one seemed particularly to want me.

JEFFERY. [*Sitting on the edge of the table, and swinging his legs.*] The reverse with me. I was wanted all the time.

FREDA. I wasn't. I don't think my father disliked me—but he died very soon. And my mother was by way of being very young, and very fashionable—and I was a nuisance to her. So I lived in the country, with a nurse, till I was sent to a boarding-school—and I must have been about six when I made friends with the old cobbler.

JEFFERY. And *he* taught you history?

FREDA. Well—scarcely taught—but he had picked up Rawlinson's Herodotus—at a stall in the market-place. Our parson had been sold up—he had been gambling—oh, a great sensation it was!—and there was my cobbler, who had scarcely read a book in his life, gloating over Herodotus!

JEFFERY. What made him buy it?

FREDA. The books were so cheap—he got them for a shilling, I believe—very tattered and worm-eaten—but he bound them and read them! Spelt it out word for word—he wasn't much of a scholar. And I used to sit on the floor, sucking my thumb, in a queer barn-sort of place where he worked—I could get to

it through our garden—and he'd tell me tales of the Greeks and Persians. Well—that was my introduction to History.

JEFFERY. You were a lonely child, Freda? So was I.

FREDA. I thought they wanted you?

JEFFERY. Yes—to do things I didn't like. My sister used to bully me—and they were all so frightfully anxious to make me a gentleman, and play games. What happened to you, after?

FREDA. Oh, horrid things always. I've been a mistake, Jeffery—or kept on picking up mistakes—I don't know which it was. But this is against the rules, isn't it? We're not here to talk.

[*She bends over her manuscript again.*

JEFFERY. Well—just for once. We've been pegging away hard, for a week.

FREDA. A fortnight.

JEFFERY. Not possible!

FREDA. It is though. To-day will be about the fifteenth time that I shall get home late for dinner.

JEFFERY. Oh, I say, what a shame!

FREDA. Alice is getting used to it. I hope there's something to show for the fortnight—though really one wouldn't think it.

JEFFERY. [*Eagerly.*] My dear friend, you've done wonders! I'm beginning to see daylight—to breathe! I was being slowly suffocated beneath the mass of notes and documents. You've saved my life, Freda—and, incidentally, the History!

FREDA. [*Bending over her manuscript.*] Well, the History won't get on, if we talk.

JEFFERY. Just one moment. How about Gellibrand?

FREDA. Oh, I've written to him.

JEFFERY. You have?

FREDA. Yes. A week ago.

JEFFERY. Not heard from him yet?

FREDA. How could I? He's in America. He'll just be getting my letter. He *will* be angry!

JEFFERY. Will he though?

FREDA. You see, he likes being a benefactor—and he'll think me ungrateful. I dare say I am.

JEFFERY. You're glad to be rid of him?

FREDA. Immensely—because, you know, his benefactions—creaked. It was inconsiderate of him, even if he *does* hate hotels, to insist on staying at the house when he came to London. It made people talk.

JEFFERY. That doesn't matter, as long as one doesn't hear them.

FREDA. That's all right for a man—but a woman hears with her toes, with her fingers, with her gloves and her veil. And I couldn't put a placard on the railings that I nursed his daughter for a year, till she died! Ah well—enough about that! Where's your Thiers? I want to verify a reference.

JEFFERY. [*Still sitting on the edge of the table.*] In the recess there—the second shelf on the right. [*She gets up, and goes into the recess by the door.*] Freda.

FREDA. [*Hidden from view.*] Yes?

JEFFERY. There's a little difficulty.

FREDA. Where?

JEFFERY. I hate talking about money.

FREDA. So do I.

JEFFERY. Then don't let's.

FREDA. Why should we?

JEFFERY. Just say yes—and it's settled.

FREDA. What is?

JEFFERY. My banker—the man with the sheep-dogs——

FREDA. I *have* settled that.

JEFFERY. Freda, when I told him my artless little story, a fortnight ago, he was apoplectic. The rule is, he must never argue with me, but just do what I tell him. Well, he nearly had a fit. Apparently he nearly had another when he saw *you*.

FREDA. [*Coming out of the recess with a book, of which she is busily turning over the leaves.*] I found him very pleasant. And I wish you wouldn't talk now—I *must* find this passage.

[*She goes to her table and sits.*

JEFFERY. I am a just man—curiously mean, when I get a chance—but just. And I had fixed the annual stipend you were to receive as my collaborator. Do you hear what I say, Freda?

FREDA. [*Busy with her book.*] I am reading M. Thiers.

JEFFERY. Please leave M. Thiers alone for a bit, and listen to me. I say, I had fixed that stipend—

which was quite inadequate, considering your services—and you abruptly told my old gentleman you would only take half.

FREDA. [*Shortly.*] That is all I need.

JEFFERY. Freda.

FREDA. Also I decline to discuss the matter. Alice and I spend very little—two women alone, with one maid. Go on with your work.

JEFFERY. I insist.

FREDA. You are wasting time.

JEFFERY. Madam——

FREDA. And breath.

JEFFERY. My dear Freda——

FREDA. [*Looking up.*] My dear Jeffery—I hate taking your money at all—but I've got to. I take as little as I can—because that's pleasantest. When Mr. Gellibrand comes to town, he won't bother me any more—and for that I'm indebted to you, and I'm grateful. And if you go on worrying me about money, I'll throw M. Thiers at you.

JEFFERY. [*With a chuckle as he goes back to his desk.*] I've always suspected you of being a violent woman.

FREDA. It's a shock to find you're a garrulous man.

JEFFERY. I usedn't to be—I suppose I've caught it somewhere. But won't you allow me——

FREDA. No. [*She returns to her book.*] That subject is closed, please. Go on with your work. We'll never get through if we talk.

JEFFERY. [*Standing with his back to her, at his desk.*]

You're the sternest and most immovable female I've ever come across.

FREDA. [*With a chuckle.*] You've never met a woman historian before.

JEFFERY [*Over his shoulder.*] There was Zacharia von Lingenthal——

FREDA. There was. And I'll throw *her* at you if you don't leave off.

[*He laughs, and starts work again; she goes on turning over the leaves of her book—suddenly she gives an exulting little cry.*

FREDA. There! I'm right! I'm so glad!

JEFFERY. [*Turning.*] What?

FREDA. Come here.

JEFFERY. [*Going to her, and standing to her right.*] Well?

FREDA. [*Pointing to a passage in the manuscript.*] That reference is wrong. I thought so. Look—it's not in Thiers' Revolution, but in the Consulate.

JEFFERY. [*As he bends over her.*] Ah—what a strange thing.

FREDA. [*Pointing to a page in the book.*] Here it is. I just happened to remember it.

[*He has his arm round the back of the chair, and his face close to hers, as he looks from the book to the manuscript—the door suddenly bursts open, and* BAYLIS *rushes in, very flushed and excited, closely followed by* LEONORA *and* ISABEL.

BAYLIS. Sir! Sir! I couldn't help it! They——

JEFFERY. Leonora! Isabel!

[*He jumps up, and stares helplessly at them.* FREDA *merely gives a little shrug, and closes her book.*

LEONORA. [*Blandly.*] We are glad to find you at home, Jeffery.

BAYLIS. I told the ladies, sir—I told them——

LEONORA. He did. The man is by no means to blame. But I fancy he might—withdraw.

JEFFERY. Yes. Go, Baylis.

BAYLIS. Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.

[*He goes. The ladies remain by the door;* LEONORA *perfectly quiet and at her ease;* ISABEL *making superhuman efforts to restrain her excitement.* JEFFERY *goes to them.*

JEFFERY. Er—what is there? I mean—has anything happened? We were——

LEONORA. Won't you introduce us?

JEFFERY. Er—ah—yes, of course. This is Mrs.—Mrs.—Freda, what the deuce *is* your name?—oh, yes, Mrs. Guildford. Mrs. Guildford, let me present to you—my sister, Lady Milligan—and Mrs. Jervoise.

LEONORA. [*Sweetly.*] Of whom you may have heard.

FREDA. [*Who has risen, and bowed.*] Oh, yes. How d'you do?

ISABEL. [*Faintly.*] How d'you do?

FREDA. [*To* ISABEL.] I trust your husband is well?

ISABEL. Thank you. Quite. [*She looks round the room.*] Jeffery! Where is my portrait?

JEFFERY. [*Staring at her.*] I beg your pardon?

ISABEL. I ask you—where is my portrait?

JEFFERY. Your portrait! Ah, yes—quite so. [*He goes to* LEONORA.] I say, Leonora—really——

LEONORA. [*Moving away, and crossing the room.*] I suppose we may sit down? [*She sits, to the left of the little table.*] Mrs. Jervoise—won't you?

[ISABEL *follows, moves the other chair close to* LEONORA'S, *and sits.* JEFFERY *turns in dire perplexity to* FREDA, *who gives him a reassuring little nod. He brings the settle forward for her: she sits. He stands between her and the others.*

JEFFERY. Mrs. Guildford is good enough—to assist me—with my work. As my collaborator. She has a remarkable historical knowledge.

LEONORA. [*Politely.*] Indeed.

ISABEL. [*Tossing her head.*] Oh, indeed!

JEFFERY. And we are working very hard. Particularly hard. And so——

ISABEL. [*A little hysterically.*] We saw you—as we came in.

LEONORA. Yes. Very interesting. Very. You are fond of history, Mrs. Guildford?

FREDA. [*Cheerfully.*] Exceedingly.

LEONORA. Charming! Such a delightful coincidence!

FREDA. I beg your pardon?

LEONORA. Oh, I mean—Jeffery being fond of it too.

JEFFERY. I can't precisely see where the coincidence comes in. When one Bishop meets another Bishop, he doesn't say "How strange!" And there are quite a number of people working at history.

LEONORA. [*Ignoring him, and inclining her body graciously towards* FREDA.] Let me see—I have met a Mr. Guildford somewhere. He may possibly be your—— [*She pauses.*

JEFFERY. [*Angrily.*] Leonora!

FREDA. [*Sweetly, as she restrains* JEFFERY *with a gesture.*] He cannot possibly be my, Lady Milligan. Because, as far as I know, there *is* no Mr. Guildford.

ISABEL. [*As she fans herself with her handkerchief.*] Fancy!

JEFFERY. Freda, there really isn't the slightest necessity——

FREDA. I think Lady Milligan would like to know. Guildford is a pretty little town in Surrey, between Ripley and Godalming.

LEONORA. I seem to have heard of it.

FREDA. And, as I wanted a name, I took that. Bright of me—wasn't it?

LEONORA. Delightful! And so original!

FREDA. I am glad you think so.

ISABEL. I told you, Jeffery, didn't I? I told you!

JEFFERY. My dear Isabel—if Mrs. Guildford had chosen to call herself Mrs. Ripley—or Mrs. Godalming

—it would not have made the least difference to me—nor could it to either of you! But I want to tell Leonora that I am really surprised——

LEONORA. [*Placidly.*] So were we, Mrs. Jervoise and I—when we chanced to meet, a week ago, and learned that you had gone, simultaneously, to Berlin and Australia.

JEFFERY. [*Bursting into hearty laughter as he twirls a chair round, and sits, between* FREDA *and* ISABEL.] It wasn't true—there—I admit it! But I'm a very hard-working man—and there are certain —polite—fictions——

ISABEL. [*Deeply earnest.*] I can understand your denying yourself to your sister, Jeffery—but not to me!

JEFFERY. My dear Isabel——

ISABEL. [*Shaking her head.*] Not to me. That was unnecessary. It was carrying delicacy too far!

JEFFERY. [*Patting her on the shoulder, and waving his hand.*] Well, well, of course this is all a very good joke—and you've stormed the citadel—repulsed Baylis with great slaughter—and found me—in! [*He rises.*] But—I put it to you very kindly—and prettily—time is really most precious with me just now——

LEONORA. [*Entirely unruffled.*] You had better sit down again, Jeffery. We haven't the least intention of going—till we've had our little talk.

[JEFFERY *makes a violent movement*—FREDA *intervenes.*

FREDA. Of course! Jeffery, *do* sit down, please! You're upsetting your sister! [*She turns to* LEONORA.] Lady Milligan, let's have your little talk, by all means! And I beg that you won't be in the least bit nervous, or embarrassed.

LEONORA. You are really exceedingly kind. I'll try. [JEFFERY *plumps himself angrily into his chair.*] Mrs. Guildford, it will not have escaped you—being a lady with considerable experience of the world—that my poor brother is one of the simplest of men.

ISABEL. You are, Jeffery—you are!

[*She lays a timid hand on his arm—he shakes it off, and shrugs his shoulders.*

LEONORA. Naive almost to childishness—and consequently most easily imposed upon.

JEFFERY. [*Angrily.*] I don't in the least mind what you say about me—but I tell you, very earnestly and emphatically, that I will not allow——

FREDA. [*Reproachfully.*] Oh, Jeffery, do let your sister go on! It's so kind of her—to tell me all this!

LEONORA. [*With a beaming smile.*] I *am* glad you think that! Well, you see, Mrs. Guildford—my brother being so helpless—I've been accustomed, for many years, to keep a guardian eye over him.

JEFFERY. Rubbish.

FREDA. [*To* JEFFERY.] Hush! [*To* LEONORA.] I'm sure that he's grateful, really.

LEONORA. One does one's duty. And so—when Mrs. Jervoise and I—made our little discovery—we thought it would be as well—to have this house watched.

JEFFERY. Confound it, Isabel! Your detective again!

ISABEL. [*Eagerly.*] She's Claude's secretary now, Jeffery! I prevailed on Claude to take her as his secretary. You see, that's so useful!

LEONORA. She has been very useful—to us. She enabled us to discover the reason *why*—my brother had gone abroad.

JEFFERY. [*Furiously.*] What!

FREDA. [*Stopping him.*] Go on, Lady Milligan—go on! The reason was?

LEONORA. Your daily, and very prolonged, visits to this house were duly reported to us.

ISABEL. Yes! They were!

JEFFERY. [*Almost frantic.*] But, upon my soul——

FREDA. [*Stopping him again, and laying a hand on his arm as she bends forward to* LEONORA—*with an ingratiating smile and speaking in the gentlest of tones.*] And you and Mrs. Jervoise naturally decline to believe—that I am working with your brother at his History?

LEONORA. [*Pleasantly.*] We naturally, and most emphatically—decline.

JEFFERY. [*Thoroughly losing his temper, and banging his fist on the table.*] But this is too ridiculous—too idiotic!

FREDA. [*Gaily.*] Not in the least—nothing is too ridiculous or too idiotic for one woman to believe about another! Isn't that so, Lady Milligan?

LEONORA. [*Judicially.*] It depends—just a little—

on the other woman's record—don't you think, Mrs. Guildford?

FREDA. [*Clapping her hands.*] Oh, how splendid! You've got that with you! Had inquiries made!

LEONORA. Oh, most ample!

FREDA. How clever of you! Quite brilliant! Do tell me, please!

JEFFERY. [*Springing up.*] Leonora, enough. I say, enough. This has gone too far already—I ought to have stopped it before. Mrs. Guildford is my friend, and I won't have another word——

FREDA. [*Earnestly.*] Oh, yes, we will, Jeffery—we most certainly will. [*She turns smilingly to* LEONORA.] I am sure Lady Milligan has been put to considerable expense——

LEONORA. [*Blandly.*] I haven't grudged it. He is my only brother.

FREDA. So please go on. I'm quite excited. [JEFFERY *makes an angry movement.*] Jeffery, I ask this as a favour. Don't interrupt any more.

JEFFERY. But this is really too monstrous——

FREDA. I ask it as a favour, Jeffery.

[*She emphasizes her words with a look and a gesture; with an angry, helpless shrug he walks away, goes to the bookshelves at the back, and furiously takes out one book after another, glancing at it, and putting it back.*

LEONORA. [*Her calmness not in the least shaken, her tone remaining pleasant and placid.*] I will be as brief

as I can. Your real name is Lady Tarrant. Twelve years ago you were married to Lord Tarrant—eighteen months after your marriage you eloped to Italy with a young sculptor named Archibald Parker. Is that correct?

FREDA. [*Gaily.*] Absolutely! But there's a comical detail that perhaps they didn't tell you. I was eighteen when I was married to Lord Tarrant—who was sixty, and had a passion for beetles. Our honeymoon was spent looking for beetles—and the rest of our married life boiling, dissecting, bottling and pickling them. *Isn't* that funny?

LEONORA. Lord Tarrant is a distinguished entomologist—and a Fellow of the Royal Society. However—though he obtained a divorce, you did not marry Mr. Parker.

FREDA. [*Laughing.*] No—you see I couldn't. He was an absent-minded man—or eloping had become a habit—at any rate he went off with some one else!

LEONORA. Subsequently you were—connected—with Prince Conti and Count Scarlatti—then you disappeared for a time, or at least we have been unable to trace your movements—a year ago you came to London under the—protection—of an American gentleman of the name of Gellibrand. These are the facts with which we desired my poor brother to become acquainted—and, if possible, in your presence.

JEFFERY. [*Turning, as he bangs down the book he holds.*] What the deuce do *I* care? What the blazes

does it matter to me? Mrs. Guildford is working with me at my History——

ISABEL. [*Reproachfully.*] Oh, Jeffery, Jeffery!

LEONORA. [*To* FREDA.] You do not deny the accuracy of those facts?

FREDA. [*Gaily.*] Dear Lady Milligan, if protesting angels came down from Heaven, you wouldn't believe them—would you?

LEONORA. If you'll allow me, I'll wait till they *do* come. In the meanwhile, I trust my informants—two Englishwomen of unblemished reputation.

JEFFERY. [*As he violently thrusts his book back in the shelf.*] Poisonous cats! Vampires! Mud-grubbers!

FREDA. I know them! Not *your* friends, of course—but the breed! I went from town to town trying to escape them—but the cheaper pensions and boarding-houses of Italy are chock-full of Englishwomen—of unblemished reputation! The dear things are elderly mostly—and not very attractive—and they go about looking for sin—that they can turn up their eyes at, and deplore to their friends at home. But—my dear Lady Milligan—it's odd—they've not told you—all!

LEONORA. They haven't?

FREDA. Why no! The reason Mr. Parker didn't marry me—this is in confidence, please—is because a rich uncle of his, from whom he had expectations—caught me putting poison in his tea!

LEONORA. What!!!

ISABEL. Oh, dreadful!!!

JEFFERY. [*Shouting with laughter, as he turns, and drops into a chair.*] Freda!

FREDA. I had a little trouble with Prince Conti—as I was cataloguing his books—because I drowned his wife in her bath—he made an absurd fuss about it—and it is known only to very few people that, after a quarrel with Count Scarlatti—to whose children I had been governess till the unblemished ones got him to send me away—I chopped him into very small pieces, and hid them in the pockets of his billiard-table.

JEFFERY. [*His sides shaking.*] I don't believe that! Italian billiard-tables *have* no pockets!

LEONORA. [*Coldly.*] These attempts at ridicule, Mrs. Guildford—or Lady Tarrant——

FREDA. Thank you—I prefer to be known as Mrs. Guildford—I gave up Lord Tarrant's name when I gave up his beetles. And you think it ridiculous that I should have chopped up Count Scarlatti into very small pieces—but not that I, a woman like me, should have my name coupled with Mr. Gellibrand's, because this old man of seventy-two insists on staying at my house when he comes to London?

LEONORA. He is not a blood-relation; he apparently runs your establishment; we have only your word for it that he is seventy-two; and there is not a woman in England who would not think as we do.

ISABEL. Not one! No—not one!

JEFFERY. [*Stamping his foot.*] Bless my soul! Women aren't really such fools as that!

FREDA. Yes, Jeffery—they are! Lady Milligan and Mrs. Jervoise are not stupider than most—I beg your Ladyship's pardon, I mean no offence—this is woman's natural and happy attitude towards woman! So—[*She jumps up, grabs her hat, and starts sticking in the pins*] dear Lady Milligan, and dear Mrs. Jervoise—I respectfully bid you good-bye.

JEFFERY. [*Jumping up and going to her.*] Freda, what are you thinking of? You shan't——

FREDA. [*Waving him away, and still addressing* LEONORA.] It has been a great pleasure to spend this half-hour in your immaculate society—and I trust that my blemishes aren't catching—and that you'll find no spots on your reputation to-morrow!

[*She seizes her cloak, and turns to the door;* JEFFERY *stops her.*

JEFFERY. Nonsense, nonsense, why should *you* go? It's *they* who——

FREDA. Good-bye—and good-bye, Jeffery! [*She goes.*

JEFFERY. [*Hastening after her.*] Freda! What d'you mean? Freda! [*He hastens after her.*

ISABEL. [*Jumping up.*] Jeffery!

LEONORA. [*Laying a hand on her arm.*] No, no—let him go! That's all right. I fancy we've—done it.

ISABEL. [*Turning to her.*] Oh, you've been splendid! I can't tell you how I admire you!

LEONORA. I have tried, as inoffensively as possible,

to perform a very painful duty. She didn't know that he had a sister to protect him!

ISABEL. How magnificent you were! Like Juno rebuking—no, not Venus—but one of Venus's upper servants! Oh, I *am* glad I went to you!

LEONORA. You acted very wisely. We have settled the lady, I think—and Jeffery knows now how false all the stories were that she must have fed him with.

ISABEL. She smarted under the lash, Lady Milligan—she writhed! And you were so calm—so judicial——

LEONORA. I tried not to be unkind. He was shocked—I saw that. And the woman still has some pride. After all, she *was* Lady Tarrant. And her "good-bye, Jeffery" means something.

ISABEL. [*Sitting to the right of the table.*] I don't quite like his following her.

LEONORA. On the contrary—that is better than his going there to-morrow. Let them have it out together—on the mat! Mrs. Jervoise, you have rendered a signal service to my family—for which I am grateful.

ISABEL. Oh, Lady Milligan!

LEONORA. Exceedingly grateful. But for your detective friend I shouldn't have known. I shall be happy to send you cards for my Tuesdays.

ISABEL. [*Warmly.*] Mr. Jervoise and I will be delighted.

LEONORA. I do not, as a rule, invite literary men, because their wives are so dreadful. And if you ask the husband without the wife, you bring disunion into their little home—association with *us* naturally

discontents them with their own womenfolk. But *you*, of course, are different.

ISABEL. [*Meekly, but with a shade of resentment.*] You are very good.

LEONORA. And I shall give instructions that a volume or two of your husband's novels—of which I think very highly——

ISABEL. Poems, Lady Milligan.

LEONORA. Ah, poems—I should have said poems, of course—shall lie on a table in one of my drawing-rooms. Nothing helps an author so much as that his books shall be seen in great houses. I would persuade him to write novels, if I were you—we seldom read poetry. Still, he possibly prefers it. In any event, my dear, you see that I am not unappreciative. And now I should like you to go home.

ISABEL. [*With a start.*] What! Me!

LEONORA. [*Nodding.*] Yes. In the first place, it will put a stop to their leave-taking—which is being unnecessarily prolonged—and, in the second, I have a proposal to make to Jeffery that I cannot make before a stranger.

ISABEL. Dear Lady Milligan, that word cannot possibly apply to *me!* Jeffery and I——

LEONORA. Dear Mrs. Jervoise, you have been of very great help in this matter—of very great help. But the time has now come for you to pass, gracefully, out of Jeffery's life.

ISABEL. You forget the bond there is between us!

LEONORA. [*With the utmost graciousness.*] If *you*

would forget it, too, dear Mrs. Jervoise, it would be distinctly agreeable to me. As his sister, I a little—deprecate—your trailing his moment of folly behind you, as though it were a scalp. I say this in the friendliest spirit.

ISABEL. And I accept it as such, Lady Milligan. Though I am sorry you describe his beautiful devotion as a moment of folly. And, in that same friendly spirit, I would most strongly urge you to leave *me*, just for a short half-hour or so, with Jeffery.

LEONORA. [*Haughtily.*] Mrs. Jervoise!

ISABEL. [*Excitedly.*] It was *I* sent him to that woman—he has done all this for me—because of his perfect love!

LEONORA. I thought I had made it clear——

ISABEL. [*Humbly.*] It is not *my* fault that he adores me, Lady Milligan! I assure you, my feeling for him has never exceeded a very mild friendship. But the poor dear fellow——

LEONORA. [*Cuttingly.*] Is it possible for you to conceive—that I have other views for my brother—than that he should go on adoring Mrs. Jervoise?

ISABEL. I can understand that it must be painful to you. You have all my sympathy. But what can we do?

LEONORA. [*Sternly.*] Mrs. Jervoise, I repeat my request—that you should go home.

ISABEL. I *must* tell him first that he can let this woman go now—that I demand no further sacrifice —from his love!

LEONORA. Mrs. Jervoise, you are—I am sorry to have to say it—an irritating person.

ISABEL. Lady Milligan!

LEONORA. Excessively irritating—and, what is worse, disobedient.

ISABEL. [*With spirit.*] Lady Milligan, you are my superior in social position—but I will not be put upon.

LEONORA. The expression is unfamiliar to me—but I suspect it of being provocative. Mrs. Jervoise, it was under a—misapprehension—that I mentioned my Tuesdays to you.

ISABEL. [*Loftily.*] Please don't let that disturb you. I shouldn't have dreamed of going. We prefer brains to money.

LEONORA. [*Placidly.*] I wish, with all my heart, that you may one day possess both. Now it really is time that Jeffery returned. Kindly ring the bell.

ISABEL. I shall not.

LEONORA. [*Amazed.*] I beg your pardon?

ISABEL. I say I shall not.

LEONORA. You are not suggesting that *I* should get up and ring the bell?

ISABEL. I am indifferent, Lady Milligan.

LEONORA. This is a punishment to me for associating, however temporarily, with the middle-classes.

ISABEL. My husband is a genius—and my father was a Judge.

LEONORA. Of the County Court. They take the doctor's wife in to dinner.

ISABEL. *Your* husband, it is well known, bought his knighthood. That is nothing to brag about.

LEONORA. Women of rank, my dear Mrs. Jervoise, do not brag—either about their title—or about men who have had the good fortune to escape from marrying them.

ISABEL. Escape!

LEONORA. That was the word I used, and I selected it with great care.

ISABEL. Lady Milligan, you are insolent!

LEONORA. I would rather describe my attitude as one of condescending frankness.

ISABEL. I repeat—insolent!

LEONORA. I can only smile pityingly, Mrs. Jervoise. And I will ring the bell myself.

[*She rises to do so—and has got as far as the fireplace when* JEFFERY *returns, looking exceedingly annoyed and worried.*

ISABEL. [*Jumping up.*] Jeffery! Your sister has been abominably rude to me!

JEFFERY. [*Crossly.*] I hope you have been abominably rude to each other. You ought to have been. You have upset Freda dreadfully.

LEONORA. If you are alluding to Mrs. Guildford——

JEFFERY. She declares she won't come here any more!

ISABEL. [*Clasping her hands.*] Oh, I am glad!

JEFFERY. [*Staring at her.*] Isabel!

ISABEL. I thank Heaven on my knees!

JEFFERY. [*Fretfully.*] Now why on earth should

you do that? You know, it's really beyond me, all this. Why have you two burst in here, and made all this fuss, and upset things?

ISABEL. [*With a large gesture.*] Jeffery, let the mask fall! Your sister knows—I have told her!

JEFFERY. I don't care what you told her. I'm telling you both. Mrs. Guildford was helping me with my History.

ISABEL. Oh, Jeffery, why this pretence? Don't you think *I* know that you lured her here—to take her away from Claude? That you risked—the most terrible of entanglements—just for my sake?

JEFFERY. [*Angrily.*] Isabel!

ISABEL. [*With a step towards him.*] Dear Jeffery, you can let her go now. You can discard her! Claude has forgotten her—he is cured. He and Miss Wilkin are getting on splendidly—he is working happily at his Epic. My Claude is safe. Jeffery, you have restored him to me! So let the portrait come back!

JEFFERY. [*Determinedly.*] Look here, my dear Isabel——

ISABEL. And the glove, and the withered rose! All the memories of me! Tell your sister what I mean to you! Tell her why it was that you thrust your head into the Gorgon's mouth!

JEFFERY. I assure you, my dear Isabel, that unless the Gorgon was a very hard-working person, with a curious knowledge of history, she had nothing whatever in common with Mrs. Guildford. Now trot away home, like a good little woman——

LEONORA. I have already, but unsuccessfully, urged that course.

ISABEL. [*With exaltation.*] I will not go till I am certain—that I have repaired the harm I have done!

[JEFFERY *stares helplessly at her—then, with a sudden inspiration, he moves a step towards her.*

JEFFERY. Isabel dearest—I will confess to you—there is only one condition—on which my quite extraordinary devotion to you can exist and continue.

ISABEL. [*Triumphantly, as she turns to* LEONORA.] You hear that, Lady Milligan! You hear! What is it, Jeffery?

JEFFERY. That we never see each other.

ISABEL. And we don't, we don't! Only in crises——

JEFFERY. Not even then, Isabel! You must never come here again. I shall give the strictest orders that you shall never be admitted. I cannot—stand it.

ISABEL. No—it is cruel of me. Oh, I realize, I understand! It is too much for you, Jeffery!

JEFFERY. Much too much, yes. More than flesh and blood—and so on. Never again, Isabel!

ISABEL. [*Deeply moved.*] Never, I swear it! But—before I go—tell me—the portrait?

JEFFERY. Shall be restored—to the place it has always occupied—in my affections.

ISABEL. There, Lady Milligan—there! So much for your moment of folly! Jeffery, good-bye. We shall not meet again. [*She holds out both her hands to*

him.] Oh, my poor Jeffery—if only I could have loved you!

[*He takes her hand—presses it—then goes, and opens the door. As she passes she takes a rose from her bosom, and hands it to him.*

ISABEL. Here! Place this—with the other!

[*With a smile at him, she goes.* LEONORA *presses the bell.* JEFFERY *closes the door, tosses the rose on to the table as he stalks angrily towards* LEONORA.

JEFFERY. Now for us two!

LEONORA. I have a strong suspicion, Jeffery, that you never really loved that silly young woman at all.

JEFFERY. Never mind about her—she has been very useful. What I want to know is precisely *why* you have come here to-day?

LEONORA. Because I am your sister, and you are my brother.

[*She sits placidly to the right of the little table.*

JEFFERY. [*Plumping himself into the settle by her side.*] Is there any way by which I can *un*-brother myself, Leonora? Something under a deed poll? A sworn declaration before a magistrate? Because I'm ready to do anything!

LEONORA. I deprecate this jesting with a sacred blood-relationship.

JEFFERY. You have wounded Freda very deeply. She is hurt at my appearing to believe what you said about her.

LEONORA. As you naturally did.

JEFFERY. I simply didn't care in the least!

LEONORA. What!

JEFFERY. No more than if you had accused her of having influenza or measles. My book was getting on—I began to see daylight. Now she positively refuses to come here again!

LEONORA. She shows a very proper spirit. What do you say to next Thursday?

JEFFERY. What *should* I say to next Thursday? What does it expect me to say? And what has it to do with Freda?

LEONORA. It happens to be an evening on which I am disengaged. And if *you* are disengaged, I would suggest your dining quietly with us, and meeting Lady Anthea.

JEFFERY. [*Quietly.*] Leonora.

LEONORA. You have evidently never loved Mrs. Jervoise—and the events of to-day must have proved to you that you are unfit to live alone. Now Lady Anthea——

JEFFERY. Damn Lady Anthea.

LEONORA. Jeffery!

JEFFERY. I have lots more beautiful swear-words I can offer you—but perhaps that one will do to dispose finally of your—chuckle-headed friend!

LEONORA. [*Rising.*] I will call again, Jeffery, when you are in a less excited frame of mind.

JEFFERY. [*Pulling her back into her chair.*] No, dearest Leonora, sit down. I can't let you go yet—

and I don't want you to call again. I've a few things to say to you.

LEONORA. [*Sitting.*] If I'm to stay here I would like some tea.

JEFFERY. You shall not have it.

LEONORA. [*Plaintively.*] I am convinced it is past the hour for tea.

JEFFERY. You shall have a few unvarnished truths instead. Leonora, I would like to shake you.

LEONORA. Jeffery!

JEFFERY. I would. Leonora, you were a frightful nuisance when you were a child. You were always so infernally neat and tidy, and wanted me to be. My happiest recollection of our childhood, Leonora, is when I coaxed you up into a tree—and you fell off into a particularly muddy and evil-smelling pond on the other side.

LEONORA. [*Reproachfully.*] I haven't forgotten your brutality on that occasion. You sat and roared!

JEFFERY. And you remember how I made you walk home on the other side of the road—because you were so—pungent?

LEONORA. I had the satisfaction that you were soundly whipped on our return.

JEFFERY. I didn't mind that—it was worth it! And, Leonora, the bough on which you were sitting didn't break—I mean, of its own accord—I had cut it half through!

LEONORA. Oh!

JEFFERY. And to-day, after thirty years, I am mighty glad I did!

LEONORA. All this—animosity—because I have saved you from that—creature?

JEFFERY. Mrs. Guildford is quite the most admirable and intelligent woman I have met. She has every quality.

LEONORA. My poor brother!

JEFFERY. And you force your way in here, and insult her. She tells me to be quiet and listen—and then she's angry with me because I *am* quiet and *do* listen. She vows she won't come here any more—she's quite determined. And that's a catastrophe!

LEONORA. I'm afraid I cannot agree.

JEFFERY. Will you tell me what's the matter with Mrs. Guildford?

LEONORA. She's divorced from her husband.

JEFFERY. Why shouldn't she be? And what then?

LEONORA. To say nothing of the—etceteras—that's a proof that she has no virtue.

JEFFERY. Heavens above! Is there only one virtue in woman?

LEONORA. One that is paramount. And its name is Chastity.

JEFFERY. I thought there was another—Charity.

LEONORA. That is, as often as not, a weakness.

JEFFERY. Well, at least, *you* can't be accused of it! For my part, I believe every word that Freda has said.

LEONORA. That she left her husband because of his beetles?

JEFFERY. Isn't that reason enough? How would *you* like beetles all day?

LEONORA. Perhaps you'll even swallow—Mr. Gellibrand being merely her friend?

JEFFERY. Of *course* he's merely her friend! That's transparently obvious. And not to believe it isn't merely wicked—it's frightfully stupid!

LEONORA. Then *I*—am stupid.

JEFFERY. [*Shouting.*] You are, Leonora, you are! I've been longing to tell it you for twenty years! You're colossally, abysmally stupid! *So* stupid as to refuse to believe that what Freda says is true; and so stupid also as not to know that even if it *weren't* true I would still regard her as infinitely your superior morally, socially—and virtuously!

LEONORA. [*Scornfully, as she rises.*] In that case—you'd better marry her!

JEFFERY. [*With a yell, as he springs up.*] By Jove! Thank you so much! It had never occurred to me!

LEONORA. [*Falling back in alarm.*] Jeffery!

JEFFERY. I declare that it hadn't! It hadn't! Leonora, I will!

LEONORA. You can't be so mad——

JEFFERY. She shall be your sister-in-law, Leonora—and podgy Sir Thomas's—and the little Milligans shall call her Aunt!

LEONORA. You wouldn't *dare* bring such a disgrace upon us!

JEFFERY. Leonora, I swear to you solemnly—I'll marry Mrs. Guildford—if she'll have me!

LEONORA. [*Looking sternly at him.*] Jeffery—if you committed so shameful an outrage—I would never speak to you again. [*She moves solemnly to the door.*

JEFFERY. Oh, better and better! [*He hastens after her.*] Good-bye, dear Leonora—and I'm so glad you came! We might have gone on working for years and years, and I'd never have thought of it! Leonora, I forgive you everything! [*He flings his arms round her, and kisses her.*] There was I, wondering how on earth I could get her back! Oh, admirable sister! [LEONORA *has freed herself—he opens the door.*] Well —must you go? I'll see you out. [*She stalks through in solemn silence.*] Leonora—as soon as we're married —we'll come to every one of your Tuesdays!

[*She departs, and he hastens gleefully after her.*

CURTAIN

ACT IV

FREDA'S *sitting-room, as in Act II. She is seated at the table, by the wall, busy with fountain-pen and paper, on an arithmetical problem that is evidently worrying her.* ALICE *comes in, from the left, with her hat and cloak on. She pauses in wonder at seeing* FREDA.

ALICE. Hullo! Not panting to-day?

FREDA. [*Without looking up.*] Can *you* tell me what eleven thirteenths of seventy-five pounds are?

ALICE. Bless me, no! but *why* aren't you panting?

FREDA. [*Laying down her pen, and smiling at her.*] Sweet Alice, I pant no more!

ALICE. [*Dropping into a chair by the table.*] What!!!

FREDA. And I am now trying to discover how much I owe Jeffery—he having paid me a quarter's salary—and our arrangement having come to an end after a fortnight.

ALICE. [*Completely bewildered.*] Your arrangement at an end!

FREDA. [*Nodding.*] It is. [*She looks at her paper again.*] Eleven thirteenths being obviously *less* than

thirteen thirteenths, the amount can't be *more*—and I keep on making it more!

ALICE. [*Trying to control herself, and be calm.*] But will you tell me—you came home yesterday long before your usual time—I thought it strange—but you——

FREDA. I didn't want to be bothered yesterday. But the fact is that Mrs. Jervoise and Lady Milligan —she's Jeffery's sister, and *such* a sister!—burst in on us in the afternoon and went for me. Tore me to shreds!

ALICE. Heaven! And he allowed it!

FREDA. Oh, poor Jeffery! What could he do? But there it is—and that's over.

ALICE. Over, over! Why?

FREDA. Simply because I won't go there any more.

ALICE. Doesn't he *want* you to?

FREDA. He did—but I told him I wouldn't. And he evidently acquiesces—for twenty-four hours have passed since then, and he has given no sign. So it's fresh fields for us, Alice—and pastures new!

ALICE. Weren't you a little—over-sensitive, perhaps? What does it matter what those two spiteful women say?

FREDA. [*Cheerfully.*] It doesn't matter to you, O Alice with the coal-black hair and sparkling eyes——

ALICE. [*Plaintively.*] Freda!

FREDA. But it matters quite extraordinarily to me. Lady Milligan was full of innuendo and slander.

And he seemed to believe her. He didn't jump up and shout "Liar!"

ALICE. His sister!

FREDA. I don't care if she'd been twenty sisters.

ALICE. You loved the work—you've told me again and again!

FREDA. I did. I've never been happier.

ALICE. And liked *him?*

FREDA. He's the dearest, quaintest, most exquisite creature I have ever met.

ALICE. [*Eagerly.*] Very well, then, isn't it foolish? Freda, I'd like to drown those two cats—I would—and as for Mrs. Jervoise—well, I've had a letter from Eliza—and it serves Mrs. Jervoise right! Only, dear, really—I put it to you—why not go back?

FREDA. [*Lifting her head again.*] Because, after what happened yesterday, we could never be on quite the same footing again. Because I'm a proud person—and, having no one to respect me, respect myself quite tremendously—and won't allow one word to be said against the woman Freda! No—not one word! And I'll be quite frank with you—I didn't tell you yesterday because I thought he'd come running here, full of apology and protestation. Well, he didn't.

ALICE. He was vexed with you, probably, for going away like that. You say that he asked you——

FREDA. Yes—but, in the interval, they'll have got round him and persuaded him—all sorts of things—you can imagine *what* sort of things! Not a word

from him. Good. I accept. And were he to come to-day I wouldn't see him. I've given instructions to Mary—I've taken a leaf from his book. I've gone to Japan!

ALICE. [*In despair.*] You mean that? You really mean it? You won't see him?

FREDA. [*Shortly.*] No. [*She bends over her paper again.*] I won't.

ALICE. [*Dolefully.*] Oh, I always knew it was too good to last! I was afraid, all the time! Well—now, of course—there's only one thing to do. You must cable to Mr. Gellibrand.

FREDA. [*Firmly.*] No.

ALICE. Say you've made a mistake—that you're sorry——

FREDA. I'm not—I'm mighty glad. I've done with Mr. Gellibrand. I'd never have taken his money if I hadn't been three-quarters starved at the time—and now I'm well fed—I'm strong and hearty—I've just written a cheque for the rent—and have sixty pounds left in the Bank. So cheer up, Alice—there's a dear girl!

ALICE. [*Wringing her hands.*] Oh, what can we do! Oh, what can we do!

FREDA. Lots of things. We're both clever women.

ALICE. The world's full of clever women, and doesn't want them. It only wants pretty ones.

FREDA. Well—we're not frights.

ALICE. You know what I mean. Haven't I worked

all my life—haven't I tried? Does any one buy my pictures?

FREDA. Do 'em on the pavement.

ALICE. Freda!

FREDA. Not a bad idea, really, you know—a nice pitch, Kensington way. I'd go round with the hat.

ALICE. Oh! Can you make fun?

FREDA. Or we might take a shop, and sell toffee. I make excellent toffee. And you'd walk about with sandwich-boards outside. And if you could wear just the same sort of face you're wearing now—every one would rush in—to escape from it!

ALICE. [*Tearfully.*] I think you're cruel.

FREDA. Well, you're such a wet blanket!

ALICE. Perhaps *I* know, better than you, what poverty means.

FREDA. I doubt it, friend Alice.

ALICE. I don't want much—and it seems so dreadfully hard. Oh, I was so happy—with my little studio upstairs! And now—to begin all over again!

[*She drops her head, and cries.*

FREDA. Oh, for Heaven's sake, don't do that!

ALICE. [*Sobbing.*] I'm so—broken-hearted, Freda!

FREDA. [*Rising briskly, and gathering up pen and paper.*] Very well, my child—have your cry out—perhaps it will do you good. In the meanwhile, I'll go in there, and work out these nasty thirteenths.

ALICE. [*With a great effort.*] I'll do what I can, Freda!

FREDA. [*Kindly, as she pats her on the shoulder.*]

Of course you will—of course. [*She goes to the side, and rings.*] And we'll stick together, Alice—there's any amount of stuff in you, really—*I* know that! You shall have half an hour to yourself—just to get bright again. And if you're not smiling when I come back—I'll thump you—I will! [*She goes to the other door.*] Tell Mary to post that letter—the rent, my dear! We've three months ahead of us, anyway!

[*With a cheerful nod she goes into the inner room;* ALICE *cries softly to herself.* MARY *comes in from the left.*

MARY. You rang, Miss?

ALICE. [*Turning her head away.*] Post that letter, please, Mary.

MARY. Yes, Miss.

[*She takes it from the table, and goes.* ALICE *sits for a moment, then suddenly jumps up, runs to the other door, and pops her head in.*

ALICE. I say—Freda——

FREDA. [*Off.*] Oh, don't disturb me now! I've got them!

ALICE. What?

FREDA. [*Off.*] The thirteenths, of course! Shut the door! Do!

[ALICE *shuts the door with a sigh, shaking her head mournfully. She sits, dries her eyes, blows her nose hard, produces a little mirror and powder-puff from her bag,*

and proceeds to powder her nose. The other door opens cautiously, and JEFFERY *pops his head in.*

ALICE. Oh!

[*She jumps up, concealing the puff and mirror.*

JEFFERY. [*Placidly.*] Good afternoon.

[*He comes in—she quickly puts the things back into her bag.*

ALICE. How did you get in?

JEFFERY. The door was open. I left it open—I hope I haven't done wrong. Where's Freda?

ALICE. [*Nodding her head towards the other door, and putting her finger to her lips as she goes to him.*] Why didn't you come yesterday?

JEFFERY. [*Sitting in the armchair by the table.*] The shops were shut.

ALICE. What do you mean?

JEFFERY. Early Closing Day. Didn't you know?

ALICE. Look here—she won't see you.

JEFFERY. [*Unconcernedly.*] Fancy.

ALICE. Don't you care?

JEFFERY. No. Do you?

ALICE. Then why have you come?

JEFFERY. There was a taxi-driver outside my house, who looked as though he wanted a job.

ALICE. Oh, Mr. Panton, *do* be serious! She declares that she'll never, never——

JEFFERY. How nice. Have you been painting this morning?

ALICE. How *could* you allow your sister——

JEFFERY. I think, one day, I'll let you paint my portrait.

ALICE. I'd love to! But do tell me——

JEFFERY. I'd prefer it to be *like* me, if you wouldn't mind. Of course I know that's very old-fashioned.

ALICE. [*Reproachfully.*] It would be much better, instead of being foolish like this, if you arranged with me what you're to say to her.

JEFFERY. [*Enthusiastically.*] Oh, yes—let's do that! I thought of beginning with "good morning." Though "good afternoon" perhaps *would* be better. What do you think?

ALICE. You don't seem to realize——

JEFFERY. [*Blithely.*] But I do, I do really. I'm frightfully depressed. Aren't you?

ALICE. I'm simply overwhelmed. Because, you see——

JEFFERY. I quite see. Is *she* depressed?

ALICE. Not a bit. That's the worst of it. She's full of fun!

JEFFERY. Shocking!

ALICE. [*Eagerly.*] Mr. Panton, I want to tell you. She's the greatest, finest woman there is in the world. Don't believe what your sister said. I don't care about myself—that is, I do—I care a good deal—but somehow, I don't. I mean, I care more about her. You don't know what she is—you can't think what she has been to me. She's just splendid. You hurt her—and it was wicked to hurt her.

JEFFERY. I believe that it's going to rain.

ALICE. [*Passionately.*] Oh, you're heartless, you are—quite heartless.

JEFFERY. [*Very concerned.*] Dreadful, isn't it? But what can one do? Suppose you told Freda I'm here?

ALICE. She declares she won't see you!

JEFFERY. Just say that the curate has called.

ALICE. Oh, don't be so silly!

JEFFERY. It isn't. She'll think it very nice of the curate. Just go in and say "Freda, the curate." Like that.

ALICE. I won't. But oh, tell me, tell me! You mean to apologize?

JEFFERY. [*Indignantly.*] Not in the least.

ALICE. Oh, Mr. Panton!

JEFFERY. Apologize! Heaven! What for?

ALICE. Then why *have* you come?

JEFFERY. I've told you—there was a taxi——

ALICE. [*Stamping her foot.*] I *won't* be treated like this! You both make fun of me! It's disgraceful!

JEFFERY. I really don't see. What are taxis for, if not to take you to places?

ALICE. I think you're too horrid for words. I think——

[FREDA *comes from the inner room, carrying the pen and paper, and a closed and addressed envelope.* ALICE *rushes to her.*

ALICE. Freda!

FREDA. [*Quietly, as she sees* JEFFERY.] Hullo! *You* are here?

JEFFERY. [*Not stirring from his chair.*] Well—in a way. Incog.

FREDA. I see.

[*She puts the pen and paper on the table by the wall.*

JEFFERY. Good afternoon. [*To* ALICE.] Perhaps that *is* better.

FREDA. Good afternoon. [*She goes to him.*] Mr. Panton.

JEFFERY. Yes.

FREDA. [*To* ALICE *who is sidling towards the other door.*] Don't go, Alice. Stay there. Mr. Panton—[*She holds out the envelope.*] Here. I'm not sure it's quite correct—because thirteenths *are* puzzlers.

JEFFERY. Besides being unlucky.

FREDA. But I've done my best—and you'll let me know if I'm wrong. Here. Take it, please.

JEFFERY. [*Diving into his pockets.*] Wait. I've something for you. [*He produces a pile of letters and papers.*] No—that's a catalogue. This one—drat—it's a prospectus. Why *will* people send me prospectuses? This is it. Yes—that's all right.

[*He offers it.*

FREDA. What is it?

JEFFERY. An invitation from the Archbishop of Canterbury.

FREDA. I don't think I've met him.

JEFFERY. No—he deplored that. But he looks forward to seeing you. Though I'm not *quite* sure he'll be there.

FREDA. Where?

JEFFERY. At the registry-office. He has specially licensed you—to marry me this afternoon.

[ALICE *jumps into the air and gives a wild yell.*

FREDA. [*Frowning.*] Alice!

JEFFERY. A fine jump, that.

ALICE. [*Enthusiastically.*] Oh, splendid, splendid! I'm so glad! Mr. Panton!

[*She flings her arms round* JEFFERY'S *neck, and hugs him hard.*

JEFFERY. [*Disentangling himself.*] I say, you know—Freda—not you.

ALICE. It's magnificent! You're a dear. You are!

FREDA. [*Tapping her foot impatiently.*] Leave us, Alice.

JEFFERY. Need she?

ALICE. Oh, yes—I'll go!

[*She hastens to the door at left.*

JEFFERY. Don't go far—or take your hat off—because we'll want you. Witness, you know.

FREDA. [*Vexed.*] Jeffery!

JEFFERY. [*To* ALICE.] My old gentleman's waiting in the taxi—I suggested he might marry you at the same time——

ALICE. [*Gaily.*] Thank you!

JEFFERY. But he seems to have a wife already—and she's so deaf he's afraid he couldn't make her understand.

FREDA. Alice.

ALICE. [*Laughing.*] Oh, yes—I'm off!

[*She slips out.* FREDA *sits on the settle, and looks at* JEFFERY, *not knowing whether to be amused or angry.*

FREDA. Jeffery, this is silly.

JEFFERY. Isn't it? That's why I like it.

FREDA. Why have you done it?

JEFFERY. Had to do something.

FREDA. It's *quite* absurd—but rather—pretty . . . I was *very* angry with you yesterday.

JEFFERY. You were. Though really it wasn't my fault.

FREDA. I dare say not. But I couldn't help that. They hurt me dreadfully.

JEFFERY. I know.

FREDA. Well—this makes amends. Why didn't you come last night?

JEFFERY. A cautious person. Thought I'd sleep on it.

FREDA. [*Laughing.*] And you have?

JEFFERY. Yes. [*He rises.*] Where's your hat?

FREDA. [*Highly amused.*] You don't *really* imagine I'm going to marry you?

JEFFERY. Of course.

FREDA. Why?

JEFFERY. Because you're not the woman to waste twenty-one pounds thirteen and six. That's what it cost. To say nothing of taxis. I've spent a fortune on taxis.

FREDA. [*Gently.*] I like your having done this

tremendously, Jeffery. I assure you, all my resentment vanishes. See, I'll tear these things up. [*She tears the envelope in two, and throws the pieces on the table.*] And I'll come to you to-morrow, and we'll go on working as before.

JEFFERY. [*Holding out the licence, and looking at it.*] A pity not to use this, I think, now we've got it.

FREDA. You'll say it was a mistake. I dare say they'll take it back.

JEFFERY. I don't know—business didn't seem to be very brisk there—they weren't selling many.

FREDA. I can't tell you the pleasure it gives me. You're such a quaint person—you never talk about what you feel. Thank you, Jeffery.

JEFFERY. [*Drawing a chair near to her, and sitting.*] I say, Freda—let's get it over.

FREDA. [*Laughing.*] Foolish man! It would be kidnapping!

JEFFERY. Do *you* think I'm such a helpless creature?

FREDA. [*Warmly.*] No—I don't. I think you're a generous creature. You saw I was bruised—and you looked for something to soothe me. Well, you've done it. But I won't marry you, dear. We're comrades and fellow-workers.

JEFFERY. [*Thoughtfully.*] Some people remain so—even after they're married. Look at William and Mary, Ferdinand and Isabella. Not many, I grant you—but some.

FREDA. We like each other very much—and we get